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DANCE IN INDIA

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THE TRAVEL DIARY OF AN ART STUDENT
THE DAUGHTERS OF THE DAWN
PEN PICTURES AND SKETCHES
FRAGRANT MEMORIES
SHRIMATI SHANTA AND HER ART
CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PAINTERS

G. VENKATACHALAM

DANCE IN INDIA



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DEDICATED
TO
SIR R. K. SHANMUKHAM CHETTI
IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE HAPPY HOURS SPENT
TOGETHER DISCUSSING ART AND ARTISTS

PREFACE

LIKE my "Contemporary Indian Painters", this book deals with some of the Indian dancers whom I have known personally and with whose art I have long been familiar. These sketches are more in the way of enthusiastic appreciations than critical studies of their art or personalities.

My interest in Indian dancing goes as far back as the early 1920's, and it is my privilege to have seen and met some of the great classical exponents of Kathakali and Bharata Natyam whose names are mere memories now. Thakazhi Kunju Kurup, Kavalapara Narayana Menon, Pattambi Ravunni Menon are happily still alive to teach and even to dance Kathakali.

Thiruvallaputhur Jeevarathnam was the last of the tribe of the great Bharata Natyam artists; and after her Balasaraswati and Varalakshmi bravely carried on the old tradition and technique in spite of the indifference of the public.

A sudden revival of the art blazed all over the land and a general interest in it was evinced everywhere. Miss Modern Education barged into this hitherto closed preserve of the devadasis, both as a fashionable pastime and as an extra outlet for her suppressed emotions; and amateur adventurers and film folk found in it a virgin soil for fruitful exploitation. Vulgarisation, distortion and degradation were the inevitable consequences.

But thanks to serious students and genuine artists like Srimatis Rukmini Devi and Shanta, it was saved from total disintegration and early extinction as a classical art. They gave to it a dignity and a cultural touch, which it had not before, without attempting to modernise it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I TAKE this opportunity to thank Mr. Haren Ghosh for permitting me to take extracts from Mr. Rajendra Shankar's very informing article "Symbolism in Hindu Dancing" published in the "Four Arts Annual" and for the use of the photos of Sadhona Bose and Shankar; Mr. S. Jepson of the "Illustrated Weekly of India" for his kindly lending me valuable photographs of Indian dancers from his archives; Mrs. Magda Nachman for the beautiful painting of Shanta for the frontispiece; Messrs. Raval, Hebbar, Shukla and Ahivasi for their drawings, Mrs. Stan-Harding, Mr. Berko, Mr. A. J. Patel, Sri Dilip Kothari and Mr. D. C. Shah for various photographs; my friends Manu Thakker, Harischandra Bhatt and Philip Spratt for their interest and help in the production of the book.

G. V.

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PART ONE

BALASARASWATI

D'ANCING is, certainly, one of the most appealing and attractive of arts. It embraces so many other lovely expressions of beauty, rhythm, poetry, music, drama, colour. No wonder it has been described as a divine art, for even the gods seem to have indulged in it. Dancing is the most natural expression of human emotions. A child breaks out most spontaneously into dance when it is elated or happy.

India developed dancing into a very elaborate science. Barring the Russian Ballet, there is hardly any other form of dance which has attained the same classical heights. Though centuries of upheavals have shaken India and changed many of its phases, the old art is still preserved, in all its pristine glory in some forgotten villages of South India.

Dominated politically, strangled economically, dis-integrated socially, India's creative impulse has weakened if not completely been destroyed. She has not had the vigour or energy left to create anew out of the old. Moreover art forms in India are made to conform rigidly to set conventions and they have come to assume almost a ritualistic sanctity which could not easily be broken.

But India has moved with the times. Her people have changed and are changing. Though they love the old, they belong to a new world. The new being needs new nourishment ; the ancient spirit has to be interpreted to new eyes. The need of the hour has thrown up new

dancers like Uday Shankar, Menaka, Rukmini, Shanta and others.

But they are only products of the new age, and some of these pioneers had not even the necessary cultural background or musical training. It was their enthusiasm and love of the art that made them realise the necessity for reviving and regenerating Indian dancing, and they set themselves deliberately to this noble task.

Their services are immense for they have paved the way for the rebirth of a precious art which might otherwise have died of neglect and forgetfulness or remained unknown to the rest of the world. If today India is conscious of the greatness of her old heritage and anxious to unearth those treasures and drink of their beauty, the credit in no small measure goes to these young pioneers.

But there are those who are of Today but who have been grounded in the technique of the old, and they have, therefore, a double advantage and can do greater service. Amongst these is Balasaraswati. As an exponent of Bharata Natyam there is none in the rising generation to equal her. She stands in a class all by herself. She had two possible rivals, talented but not so versatile, in the late Jeevarathnam of Thiruvallur and Varalakshmi of Kumbakonam. In their death India lost two of the notable exponents of this art and the world two of its most gifted dancers.

Bala—to call her by the name familiar to her friends—is a young buxom woman of about twenty-four, well built, radiating strength and power. She is not mere grace, not one of those soft yielding colourless types but a definite personality with an individualistic and purposeful character of her own. And this is seen not only in her life and attitude but in her art as well. She expresses not the mere woman but woman as artist.

For generations Bala's family had led the music

world of the South and even now her family has some of the best singers in the Tamil country. Her mother is a reputed singer whose repertoire of padams is such a unique feature of her daughter's dance recitals.

She is no stream-lined girl, this dancer, and yet her slightest step suggests graceful motion. There is poise in her pose and speed in her actions. It is then you realize the infinite possibilities of this art and what a creative artist like Balasaraswati can do with it. It is then her body becomes as supple as the kusa grass, as sinuous as a snake, as clinging as a creeper and as light as a feather and you begin to wonder if she was the same tamasic rotound person you saw off the stage. It is true that of late she has become too fat and too unweildy to be in her form or to show her best, and often enough she is heavy, clumsy and so pathetic-looking as to bring tears in the eyes of her admirers ; but even then there are moments when she can rise to superb heights and put even the most gifted of the young rising dancers into the shade. Though her nritta has suffered an eclipse, her abhinaya is still the finest part of her dance art.

A girl of extraordinary moods and wild temperament, she must be in a good humour to reveal the best in her art. Oftentimes she proves an indifferent dancer, and often it depends upon the nature of the audience. She knows her audience and can play with it as she likes. She has risen to wonderful heights in her art when she knew that there were people who really understood and appreciated it and she has equally failed to rise to any height when she knew that she had to dance to please somebody or earn a few rupees.

She has such a high opinion of herself and her art that she is not a respecter of any public or patrons. And she is the one artist I know who cares little for money and less for fame. She is a born fatalist, like M. S. Subbu-

lakshmi, both of whom, though conscious of their genius, are yet indifferent to their future.

Balasaraswati's strong point is her abhinaya, in which she stands unrivalled and supreme. Whether in nritta or nritya, Bala is still the most accomplished dance-artiste of India, and like her grandmother, the late Veena Dhanam, a peerless queen in her realm.

I first saw Balasaraswati dance when she was about thirteen. "She'll be a great dancer one day", remarked her host, a family friend of the artist, as if he was giving expression to a profound prophetic utterance about her future ! "Why, she'll be a big sensation next year if she goes on at this rate", was my spontaneous tribute to her rising genius.

And when she made her debut that year and had all Madras at her feet none could have rejoiced more than the present writer. Since then she has risen to greater and greater heights and has won for herself a name as great as her illustrious grandmother.

The tragedies of life haven't spared her youth or genius and her own irrepressible nature and inborn impulses have played havoc with her art. Being a girl of moods, she has bright and sunny moments as well as gloomy and depressing periods. Like all sensitive people she has her crucifixion as well as her resurrection, her vale of tears as well as her peak of happiness.

Robust, vital, with passionate expressive eyes and a mobile face, Balasaraswati is fascinating like a fearless fawn and as seductive as a Mathura Mithuna. Precocious, witty and intelligent, she can hold her own in any company, especially in the company of art pandits, and often come out with flying colours in discussion on dance or music. Terribly self-opinionated, she accepts no equals and recognises no superiors. In spite of all these, she is a likeable person and a charming woman.

The institution of devadasi is, perhaps, as old as the temple in South India, with its own rigid caste rules, privileges, obligations and laws of inheritance. It was part of the ancient Hindu social order, and like other communities and guilds served a definite purpose, both secular and religious. Just as the brahmins were specially trained for being priests and pandits, so were the devadasis were specially trained in music and dancing for entertaining the community on social and religious occasions. These dancing girls were, and are even now, highly accomplished women, who can hold their own in the theories and rasas of their art against any pandits and, what is more, reveal them in their lives.

Their position in society was assured and, like the Vestal Virgins in ancient Greece and the Geishas in Japan, they were held in respect and not looked down upon as in the present day. Evil days fell on that institution as on many other aspects of Indian cultural life, and priestly cunning and vulgar wealth, taking advantage of its helpless position, reduced it to the level of a glorified prostitution.

All devadasis, it must be emphasised, were not, and are not, prostitutes in the cheap sense of the word. They have their own orthodox customs, courtesies, etiquettes and even morals; and some of them have remained, and even now remain, faithful and loyal to the first man they are married to, according to their custom, like dutiful wives.

Dancing girls, dedicated to temple worship, are first formally married to a sword or family deity with tali and all, brahmin priests and the family nattuvans presiding over such occasions. Even their debut in dancing, the arangetral, takes place first in the temple before their tutelary god, at which function the nattuvan-teacher gets his first payment for his labours, and from then on an

unwritten law binds the two in a kind of business partnership.

The highest bidders from the rich communities, often married men with wife and children, usually keep these girls as their mistresses, often treating them better than their own wives ; of course, for a time only. The children born in this wedlock are not outside the law of Hindu inheritance, and both boys and girls are entitled to equal shares. The girls are, of course, the specially privileged as they are the future earning members of the family. There have been cases where some of these women have lived loyally and truthfully with their first paramours for thirty and forty years.

Of course, all that has changed and is changing now. The films and theatres have opened up a paying career for them which, while bettering their material prospects, have slowly undermined their old traditional outlook and relative morality. Now, they do not hesitate to change hands or run amock among the idle rich and gay bachelors. But still there are among them devadasis who stick to their old customs and ways of living and who still cling to one man for a number of years, and to that small band of cultured devadasis Balasaraswati belongs.

Her grandmother, Veena Dhanam, was a highly respected and greatly honoured musician to whom even the great vidwans of her days, irrespective of castes and status, paid homage. Her home was the meeting place of all the great musicians and art lovers, and where music, song, laughter and joke flowed freely. Dhanam's grandmother too was a great dancer and musician honoured by the rich and learned in her day. Even today this family is the repository of all that is the best and finest in Carnatic music, and Balasaraswati herself is as talented a singer as she is a dancer. ...



SHANTA RAO IN BHARATA NATYA

By Margda Nuchman



RUKMINI DEVI

2

RUKMINI DEVI

IS genius a matter of heredity, or is it the "art of taking infinite pains"? Is art spontaneous creation, or is it laboured achievement? Is art free and unfettered, or is it one of design and discipline? Is there conscious effort and deliberate planning behind any great work of art, or is it the unconscious and effortless expression of a tremendous creative mood?

The experts, of course, have their own theories and conclusions, all arbitrary, assertive and authoritative. There are as many definitions of art as there are critics who have attempted to define or interpret it.

There are the critics who interpret art in terms of environment and movements of matter, without reference to any life influx at all. And there are those who see no inspiration or spontaneity in art creation but only human forethought and planning, like building a house or framing a constitution. The truth, however, seems to lie somewhere between these two opposing views; and the life and work of all great artists tend to confirm this.

The art of the dance in India, as evolved and elaborated in this ancient land and codified in that classic, Bharata Natya Shastra, is a very complicated science, with a history as old as the Hindu civilization itself, with a technique as rich and varied as the races that inhabit the land, and with a vitality as perennial as the culture that gave birth to it.

Bharata Natyam is not the inspired work of any single

individual or group of individuals, but is the heritage of the race. It is like any one of the mighty things for which India is rightly famous, like the Himalayas, like the Upanishads, like the South Indian bronzes. It is a stylized art, like the Russian ballet or the Rajput Miniature and an art for the connoisseur.

In this great art there is as much designing, planning and forethought as there are unfettered rhythmic movements and spontaneous expressions. There is as much scope, within its rigid codified rules, for individual uniqueness and self-expression as it is possible to imagine. It is an art where the artist does not get lost or crushed, but where the dancer finds fresh inspiration, new discoveries and limitless possibilities. It is a world in itself, a world of rhythm, where there is much unsuspected beauty of design and composition.

Bharata Natyam as preserved and practised in South India, is most unquestionably the classical dance art of ancient India. Only the South has been able to retain its pristine purity and its primary forms unsullied by any outer influences. Like the Carnatic music, it is a vast storehouse of art-idioms, and no dancer, however great or original he or she may be, can really exhaust its rich beauty.

Among its living exponents and interpreters, Srimati Rukmini Devi easily stands supreme, and her art is unique in that it is extremely refined and definitely classical Bharata Natyam in its popular aspect as Dasi Attam, has long been held an erotic art, and was taught as such to young devadasis by its hereditary exponents.

Rukmini Devi is a genius. Her cultural heritage is great, and she has had an ideal environment for the full flowering of her soul. Genius though she is, she had to work hard, like any other aspirant, to master the technique of the art, and learn for years before she could perfect

the complicated bodily movements and intricate footsteps with appropriate gestures and facial expressions.

Inspiration is all right; creative imagination is necessary, but the artist needs technique, medium and form through which to express her individuality, and this means hard honest work and not fanciful hops and fantastic gyrations of the limbs and hips attributed to the moods of the moment. There is inspiration in art, spontaneity in expression, but they do not express themselves in the ridiculous way claimed by some of the so-called dancers.

To see Rukmini Devi dance, in her earlier days, was to see an inspired artist at work. Her art was her own and an expression of her soul. Taught by the greatest teacher of the Bharata Natyam in South India, Pandanalur Meenakshisundaram Pillay, she has had the best of training.

There were moments in her dancing when she was almost ethereal, but such moments, even in her case, were rare, and it is possible that she herself was unconscious of it. She was then like an uncaught flame, burning with a bright lustre, almost too beautiful to be real.

When she was in one of those rhythmic moods, where she lost herself in her dance, it was difficult to gauge at times how much of hers was body and how much soul. It was one of those rare moments of ecstasy when soul and body blend themselves subtly and exquisitely to be a perfect expression of life. She lived then in a world of her own, a world all too rare even in an artist's life.

One had not realized till then that a human body could effect such a rich variety of striking attitudes and graceful flexions; and even the seemingly impossible poses that one sees and studies in Indian sculpture become a possibility. And Rukmini Devi's pose of Nataraja was about the nearest possible to that wonderful original in bronze,

that immortal creation which has ravished the hearts of art lovers the world over.

"Rukmini Devi is the most fascinating personality I have ever seen on the stage", remarked an artist-friend, himself a widely travelled man. She is an uncommon type of beauty, whether off or on the stage. Everything about and around her is elegant and artistic. Her costumes, designed by herself, are the delightful creations of one who understands the value of the line and colour and who knows how to combine them to produce the most pleasing effects. Her jewels are real gems and are as rich and radiant as her art.

On the stage she was like a dream come true, a vision materialized. Her face became like a magic mirror on which subtle passions and emotions played an endless "hide and seek", as she portrayed the navarasas of her art, while her nimble feet danced with joyful cadence and her lithe body moved and swayed gently and softly like the ruffled surface of a calm mountain lake. "Burning Eyes" described her physical personality as "Dancing Flame" suggested her genius.

Rukmini Devi's art cannot be described. To attempt it would be like trying to trace the ecstasy of spring-time or the joy of the dawn. It had to be seen to be experienced. Rukmini Devi brought to us something of that ancient greatness of our forefathers, a breath of India's real spirit. She is the daughter of Today who had captured and for ever made her own the luminous gifts of Yesterday. She not only made us relive the age gone by but she stirred us to create the age to come.

Her dancing days are now over. Youth, vitality and suppleness of body are the first requisites of a dancer, especially a Bharata Natyam dancer. After thirty, even the most gifted dance-artist becomes a poor caricature of her former self. Fortunately for Rukmini, she has an institu-

tion where she can train young girls after her tradition and style. Her Kalakshetra has already produced two gifted youthful dancers, Srimatis Radha and Sarada, who are winning name and fame for themselves.

Rukmini's pioneering work is bearing rich fruits; but it will not be as a great classical exponent of Bharata Natyam that a grateful posterity will recognise her but as the founder of an international culture movement in India, which has the seed of a promising future within it. Though dancing has been the great passion of her life, she has other cultural interests, not the least of which is bringing back into modern life something of the imperishable beauty of the ancient world. For that magnificent work one cannot help saluting her.

Rukmini comes of a cultured brahmin family of Tanjore and came under the liberalising influences of Theosophy while quite young. The late Annie Besant discovered her genius and helped her to fulfil her dharma. Bold, ambitious and strong-willed, she braved all the furies of her people and community to marry the man of her choice, an Englishman of exemplary traits and lofty character. Together they travelled far and wide, spreading the message of Eastern wisdom and beauty and were recognised as two great cultural ambassadors.

Dr. Arundale, her husband, was a man of large parts, deep understanding and unexampled devotion and loyalty, and to him Rukmini was the very embodiment of Hindu beauty and culture. She has lost a great comrade and an ideal companion by his sudden death. "My child of the brave heart" was the tribute paid to her by a Teacher vastly superior to that warrior-woman Annie Besant, and for one so blessed the future is bound to be bright and beautiful.

3

SRIMATI SHANTA

S RIMATI SHANTA was a child of six, fascinating like a little fawn, when I first met her. Her home in Bombay, then, was the rendezvous of the non-violent rebels of the 1931 Civil Disobedience Movement. Her parents were such perfect hosts that their home was like a busy bee-hive, with youthful plotters and serene elders enjoying their hospitality.

The poet Harindranath and I were first casual visitors and later regular guests. From the start Shanta took kindly to me and we soon became pals. Her childish tyranny even then was terrible. Not only must I render an account of my day's doings but reserve the evenings to go to the pictures with her, and in general play the proverbial uncle to her.

Tomboyish, she would drag me to climb trees, jump fences, run races and do all the little tricks which I had thought I had outgrown. She was quite grown up for her age and said and did things which astonished everyone. Wide-eyed, she would sit and listen to all the plots and counter-plots of the Congress conspirators, and even carry an errand or two for them, when not learning fiery patriotic songs from Harindranath.

To her was first taught the then famous battle-hymn of the Bombay satyagrahis, "Suruhogaya Jung", composed by Harin Chattopadhyaya ; and hers were the first smiles to greet the author of the song after he was arrested and put behind the prison bars.

Shanta's childhood days were as happy as any that a child could wish. She grew up in a free atmosphere with



SRIMATI SHANTA

no fear of threats or punishment, and had no interference from anybody, not even from her parents. She did what she pleased and went where she liked, a strong trait in her nature even today.

In spite of a happy home and freedom to live her own life, she was discontented, and her heart was restless for the real things her soul craved for. Her inner urge was for music, dancing, painting, for doing bigger and better things than mere passing of examinations for a professional career. She was destined for the more adventurous and hazardous life of an artist rather than the humdrum life of a respectable housewife or responsible mother.

Shanta's heart and mind were after more enduring things than a cushy job or a comfortable life. She wanted to be a painter, singer, dancer, an artist ; that was her dharma. It would have been the easiest thing for her, if she had wanted it, to have married happily and settled down to a comfortable life, as girls of her age and education do, but she deliberately chose an artist's career with all its attendant uncertainties and surprises but more than compensating delightful mental adventures, emotional enrichment and freedom. Who can say if she was wise or not in this choice ? She is happy as an artist and that is what matters most.

Seeing her flaming enthusiasm and burning passion for these higher callings, I suggested to her parents that not college but a good grounding in classical dancing was what she needed and what would satisfy her inner yearnings and bring peace to their home. Before they could make up their minds, Shanta decided her future for herself, and knowing her stubborn nature they gave in, not, of course, without certain doubts and misgivings.

And the responsibility of guiding her innocent steps along this delightfully dangerous path fell upon my

shoulders, and no light responsibility it was. Shanta was not only fifteen but had beauty and genius, a combination to frighten even the stoutest of hearts and the wisest of men.

And so it happened that Shanta found herself, early in 1939, at the Kerala Kalamandalam, in Cochin State, to learn the difficult art of Kathakali. This unique dance drama of Kerala was then attracting the attention of art lovers, and the Kalamandalam was the big noise in the dance world of India. Dancers like Uday Shankar and Gopinath popularised this art in North India, and Kathakali teachers were in demand in centres like Shantiniketan and Almora.

And so to a sensitive soul like Shanta's, a genuine school like the Kalamandalam and a real master of the art like Ravunni Menon were like the materialisation of a beautiful dream. She was indeed happy to get away from the money-making monsters who passed for art teachers in that big city of bullion and brazen hearts. Kerala, in spite of its poverty, was an earthly paradise for her.

She was the guest of the poet Vallathol, the founder of the school, in the early days of her stay there, and later a residential student. The poet's welcome to Shanta was as warm and sincere as it was prophetic: "Ah! You have such a perfect body for dancing and you'll soon be the Number One Dancer of India."

She loved to roam among the low hills of Cheruthurthi and play with the swift flowing currents of the river after her day's work was over. For companions she had village girls who were her fellow-pupils and the members of the poet's family. Her shy simple nature and unassuming friendliness endeared her to one and all, especially to her wished to learn—and she wished to learn so much.

Shanta was the first and only girl to take to Katha-

kali seriously and to attempt to learn some of the vigorous dances which are usually taught to professional actors. The other girl-pupils were merely taught the lighter and simpler steps and movements, more of the lasya type, but Shanta tried to master such difficult and complicated pieces as Thodayam and Ashtakalasam.

Her Thodayam was considered, both by Vallathol and other Kathakali experts, as one of the finest renderings of that type of dance-sequence ; and her teacher, Ravunni Menon, took special pride in her performance of that still more difficult bit of dramatic acting in Kathakali, "the killing of Dussasana", which the experts considered as good as any by the most experienced actors.

A stern teacher and a hard taskmaster, Ravunni Menon is hard to please, and to him Shanta was an ideal pupil who worked as hard and as conscientiously as the master himself. The poet himself composed a Tandavarnitya for her, which along with the Thodayam and Ashtakalasam were her favourite items in her Kathakali repertoire.

Luckily for Shanta, the seventy year old Panikkar, the only living Mohini Attam teacher, was then at the Kalamandalam, and to her it was too good an opportunity to be missed. And though to her Kathakali teacher this seemed an unwise step (like all great masters he had a poor opinion about arts other than his own), Shanta learnt some fine examples of that dance, including the famous Kamatchi Varnam.

Shanta is, unquestionably, the finest exponent of this art today ; and at her Kathakali debut at Trichur, in 1940, before a crowded house of Nambudris and Kathakali experts, when she did the Kamatchi Varnam, she revealed unsuspected beauties in that dance to the utter amazement of her audience who had never seen the like of it before.

Shanta's debut in Bharata Natyam at the Museum Theatre in Madras and later at the Music Academy early in 1943, and her crowded recitals in the various music associations of South India, during the last two years, have had their meed of praise from the press and the public ; and such of the connoisseurs as have watched her development have all, with one voice, acclaimed her as " the finest flower of Bharata's ancient art " and as " the most conscientious Bharata Natya artist."

Her repertoire in Bharata Natyam is, perhaps, richer than that of any other artist that I know. She knows nine long Varnams, each lasting for an hour and more and which she renders without any breaks or flaws ; one in Kalyani lasting for seventy minutes, her piece-de-resistance, and Thana Varnam " lasting three hours, the only dancer to know it in South India. She knows eight tillanas, all of which are thrilling visions of ancient sculptural art come to life, because of her perfect figure and conscious efforts ; seven jethiswarams, two sabdhams, two or three alarippus and over twenty padams in her repertoire, are no mean achievements.

She is the only Bharata Natyam artist that I know who keeps any audience,—the most critical like the Mylapore crowd or the most cosmopolitan like the Gokhale Hall one, even a gathering of European and American artists and laymen,—completely absorbed in her art and does not bore them with a programme of three hours. Seeing her dance with unabated interest and visible joy, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu hailed her as the " Spring-Time Dancer from the South ", and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru rushed to compliment her, after her Excelsior recital in Bombay, and said : " Shanta, I never knew Indian dancing could be so beautiful ! " And discerning critics, both Indian and European, hailed her as " A Modern Malivika ", " The One and Only Shanta."



MENAKA

MENAKA

THE Haffkine Institute, at Parel, was once the official residence of the Governor of Bombay. It is, today, a well-known research laboratory for vaccines, serums and things of that sort. It is hardly the place to look for anything like art, beauty or culture. And yet . . .

A short circular drive from the main gate leads you to a low-roofed bungalow, inside a small garden, with wide running verandahs and large airy rooms, where live a romantic couple, a scientist and an artist, whose home is one of the few cultural oases in that desert city of stock-exchange and share-bazaars. This quiet restful house, inside a busy scientific institute, is the private residence of its Director, Colonel Sir S. Sokhey, I.M.S. and his wife Leila Sokhey, the Indian dancer.

It is not only her home but her studio, her workshop, where she was ever experimenting with new rhythms and new steps, where she was incessantly learning new dances, creating new compositions, fashioning new programmes and training other younger dancers. This house ever resounded with the sweet music of sitar and sarangi, the soft time-beats of tabala and mridung, the tinkling sounds of anklett-bells and the loud laughter of boys and girls. Here was born the first Indian Ballet, a new and significant factor in the Indian art renaissance, and here were trained its future artists.

Colonel Sokhey himself is a great lover of the fine

arts. He is not merely a doctor and a research scholar but a man of intellect, a student of world affairs, a connoisseur of books, a radical and free-thinker in the best sense of those words. It is a pleasure to meet this man and discuss with him any topic under the sun, art, literature, science, politics, economics, and he is equally well informed in all. He is a prodigious reader and what he does not know on a subject is not worth knowing. His library is filled with the latest books from the publishers and journals from all over the world. A brilliant conversationalist, an uncompromising iconoclast, but nevertheless a charming man. Leila and he are comrades, each pursuing her or his own career, never trying to dominate one another and ever trying to understand each other, they have made their home a fine cultural centre.

Over this household presides Menaka with dignity and utter simplicity. No luxuries surround her daily life but there is plenty of comfort, ease, grace and beauty. Sitting cross-legged on a low settee, piled with soft coloured cushions, in a cool corner of the verandah near the steps, she spends her time, when she is not practising her dances, smoking, reading books, chatting with friends, planning her programmes. There is a simplicity about her surroundings and a naturalness about her attitude towards life. No pose, no insincerity, no cheapness, no display of vulgar taste.

A friend and confidant of princesses and potentates she has no illusions about wealth or its glamour. A favourite of Pavlova, a widely-travelled woman, Menaka has no false notions of herself or of her art. True greatness is true humility. She believes in hard work, in discipline, in regularity, and leaves nothing to chance. Inspiration is all right but it needs to be directed, controlled, to be creatively useful; and genius, to her, is the art of taking infinite pains. She has no patience with slackers

and is severe on those who pose as dancers with no proper training, no genius or capacity for being one. Neither does she spare herself. She is ever learning—and all artists are and can only be eternal students of their arts—and is always willing to learn from others.

Imperious, unconventional, sympathetic, big-hearted, she charms all with her intelligence and understanding. Her artificialities of vivid make-up and finery in dress are superficial and skin-deep, so to speak ; she is, at heart, genuinely natural and simple. A charming hostess, she knows how to entertain her friends, not lavishly but graciously, and she is “at home”, with equal geniality and attention, to a Tagore as well as to an ordinary newspaper reporter. She does not believe in the foolish notion of society with a capital S, and the silly words “Our Set” have no meaning to her. She is just a woman and an artist ; in other words, a charming personality.

Menaka had great ambitions and her enthusiasm is no less great. An admirer of the Russian Ballet, she had long been dreaming of an Indian equivalent that would show to the world the hidden beauties of Indian life through rhythm, movement, music and song. She was untiring in her efforts towards its realisation, spending all her energy, time and money in training pupils to form the nucleus for the first Indian Ballet troupe. A magnificent dream worthy of Menaka!

The art of dancing in this country had attained a high state of perfection and was one of the noblest of arts in ancient days. It was a sacred art, and according to the old traditions was the first art to be learnt and mastered by all artists, since it taught the “rhythmic significance of forms.” Such a fine and noble art fell into disrepute, and as ages went on, became the monopoly of a particular community, the Devadasis, professional dancers.

Its idealism was lost and the art was used to baser

ends, to fascinate men and lure them to evil ways. It was looked down upon by all so-called decent people ; and it therefore required no ordinary courage to make an attempt to revive this beautiful art and raise its moral tone. Thanks to Menaka, it is now being lifted up from its present position and placed on a pedestal worthy of that ancient art, drawing men's attention to its beauty, grace and usefulness.

Tall, slim, elegant, cultured and attractive, she took to dancing as her best and natural mode of artistic expression. After acquiring a commendable mastery over the technique of European dancing in Europe, she turned her attention to the revival of the old Indian dancing. She looked to Ajanta for inspiration, and a number of interpretative dances which she gave years ago in Bombay were poses and studies from these cave paintings. 'Ajanta Darshan' she called one of them. The success achieved in her first attempt encouraged her to lead on in this direction and be the foremost pioneer and exponent of this lost art.

What India has lost by apathy and indifference, neglect and positive perversity, only a revival of this great and glorious art would reveal by building up a new womanhood of grace, health and beauty.

More educated girls are now going in for dancing, it is true; more is written and talked about it, it is obvious; but there is, unfortunately, a general tendency to cheapen and vulgarise it. The so-called dance-artists of the film world have worked enough havoc in this direction, and the mad rush of the so-called society girls to possess this accomplishment threatens its early destruction. Hindu classical dancing cannot be taught or learnt through a correspondence course or as a fashionable hobby for drawing-room entertainments ; it must be learnt seriously, conscientiously, as Menaka or Rukmini or

Shanta has done. It must be a life-time passionate study.

Menaka is getting old now and her dancing days too are over. She has had her day and deserves the thanks and gratitude of the Indian public for her splendid pioneering work. Her early ballets were really artistic successes. She realised, years ago, one of her long cherished dreams when she produced her first "Ras-Leela" ballet, which was impressive and moved with a tempo and swing which one missed in her latter attempts. The most ambitious one was her interpretation of Kalidasa's "Agnimitramalavika", in which she used both the Kathak and Kathakali technique, much to the detriment of the latter. It proved a success in spite of her own bad performances in it.

Her early dance compositions were more of a lyrical nature, and such short pieces like "Usha", "Birth of Lakshmi", "Naga Kanya", "Dance of Devotion" and the "Moghul Serenade" had immense popular appeal, especially in foreign lands. Next to Shankar, Menaka is about the most widely travelled dancer from India and there are few towns and villages in Middle Europe where she had not danced in her tours.

She was as popular in Europe as Uday Shankar was in America, and both contributed to the popularity of Indian dances in the West. A Berlin critic, who saw Menaka at her best, expressed his admiration and appreciation in passionate poetry : "Has a flower to exert itself to give us joy ? The wind blows it hither and thither, it bends on the wavering stem towards the sun and moon. Such is the dance of the Indian dancer, Menaka !" It may mean much or nothing ; it all depends upon what the critic meant and how much he was capable of understanding Indian dance art. Nevertheless, it is a fine tribute from Europe to India for what little beauty it was able to see in this age-old art.

SHRIMATI HUTHEESING

I FIRST heard of her while alighting from my train at Bolpur, on my way to Santiniketan. "Have you ever met Shrimati?" asked an artist pupil of Tagore who came to meet me at the station.

During my brief stay of two days, I had glimpses of her. Nandalal Bose, her art-master, was full of her praises. She was, I found, the pet of the Poet and a favourite of all. She was from Gujerat (the first girl to visit Santiniketan from that province) and she enjoyed certain privileges.

Shrimati was the best dressed young lady in the compound and easily the most striking looking. She moved about the place like a Kangra Miniature come to life. Hers was not a common type of beauty but rather a classical one with a face like that of the Madonna and eyes large and dreamy as those of the Ajanta women. That was when she was young.

Shrimati was studying painting under Nanda Babu, music under Dina Babu, and dancing under Nabha Kumar, and was showing progress and promise in all these arts. This was decades ago. Since then she has blossomed into one of India's foremost dancers and made a name for herself as an artist of real merit and distinction.

She has travelled widely both in India and in Europe, studying, sketching, dancing, and thus enriching her mind and arts. She went afoot through the Hinnalayas for



SHRIMATI HUTHEESING

a while, and later visited the salons in Paris and Berlin, eager to know, learn and understand. "Who is this Miss Hutheesing, a dancer from India?" wrote a friend from Europe.

Returning to India she started giving dance recitals on her own. Rabindranath Tagore felt proud of his pupil and encouraged her to interpret some of his poems in her own way, and she delighted him with her dances. Thus was born "The Spirit of Rhythm", one of Shrimati's favourite dance compositions. To Rabindranath she was one of the best exponents of Indian dancing and he was never tired of singing her praises.

Calcutta welcomed her heartily when she gave her first public show in that city; Colombo applauded her art to the skies; Madras and Bangalore opened their eyes to a new vision of dance-art. She was then the most popular of Manipuri dancers.

Dancing is not a mere matter of mastering the technique or blindly conforming to traditional forms; it is the joyous expression of life's moods, passions, aspirations and anguishes. It is not merely a vocation or a hobby but the life-throb of sensitive souls, the creative expression of the surging life within. Rhythm is the basis of life, as it is of the Universe, and this law of rhythm is behind all manifestation, behind all nature's phenomena, behind all creative arts.

Indian dancing, as a science and an art, is based and built upon this inner "rhythmic significance of forms." Its motifs are highly conventionalised, and its mastery is a matter of years' devoted learning and practice. In its present decadent state it is all science and no art; all form and no life; all tradition and no creation.

But, fortunately, there is a tendency today for more freedom of expression and for more creative composition, and it is here dancers like Shrimati, Menaka, Shankar,

Rukmini, Shanta and others can give the necessary lead and save Indian art from a tradition that has lost its soul. Of course, there is a danger in this as well, but every born artist, like Shrimati, is so attuned to rhythm that she could not feel, think or express herself otherwise than rhythmically, and that distinguishes a born dancer from a spurious one.

Shrimati may not have, in fact, has not, any profound knowledge of the theory of Indian dancing, as some pundits who write learnedly on dancing have, but she is, being an artist, no stranger to the rasas and bhavas inherent in the art itself. She lives these moods while the pundits only talk about them. To her the birth-pangs of love, the anguish of separation, the joy of freedom, the agony of captivity, frustrated hopes and unfulfilled desires are not so many mental intagaries but part of the emotional experience which ever feeds and nourishes her artistic life.

Shrimati was one of the most representative of modern Indian dancers, and her art was a treat of the rarest kind. An artist to her finger-tips, a dancer to the very core of her being, she created magical moods with her genius. You saw them not only in the rhythm of her dances but also in the atmosphere of her productions.

Nothing was tinsel or tawdry about her art. Everything was genuinely beautiful. Her costumes, ornaments, background and accompaniments were not just stage accoutrements to deceive the eye but objects of art that ought to and should surround one's daily life.

The settings, with their simple coloured cloths and embroidered Sind and Cutch works, could not be improved upon or beautified by costly mechanical contrivances. The costumings and draperies were the creations of a cultured artist, and she had shown how to create chaste, simple, beautiful backgrounds for stage performances. It

was in these little details that you discovered her true genius.

Her dances were visions of rhythm, grace, beauty, poise and movement. Her body, supple like a tender willow, swayed and moved from a centre deep within and the musical accompaniments merely gave the time-beat and the melody-setting. She did not dance to music; music kept time to the rhythmic beat of her soul.

And this is the secret of all great dancers. It is not enough to possess a supple and sensitive body and a mastery over technique, but the soul of the artist must be aflame with the fire of life. A Pavlova cannot be produced in a studio; she is born. Shrimati shared this great soul-quality with that incomparable dancer who had the world at her feet.

Shrimati's dances included simple folk-dances like the Garba Pot Dance and classical dances of the Kathak and Manipuri type. "Devotee" was a beautiful rendering of a type of Manipuri dance which the Tagore Players have made popular throughout India. "In Bondage" and "Freedom" we saw other moods of Shrimati and her versatility. Some of these dances were strictly conventional and follow traditional forms, and others were original compositions inspired by the mood and the theme. Her last creation was an interpretation of Nataraja's dance inspired by that famous bronze in Madras. Though she has not danced for a considerable time her enthusiasm is as fresh as ever.

Shrimati is strangely modern and ancient, sensuous and spiritual. Intensely practical and business-like, she is yet dreamy and other-worldly. In her attitude, outlook, behaviour, culture, she is a modern among the moderns, but she has withal all the gracious charm and tender gentleness of the old world.

MY first contact with Kathakali goes as far back as 1923 and my close association with the Kerala Kalamandalam to 1932 when I took Ragini Devi to meet Vallathol. It was a young institution then just drawing the attention of the outside world, but quite active in its work.

The Kalamandalam was housed in a rented building close to the village Mulankunnathukavu, and the surroundings were pretty and attractive. There were already a number of young boys under training, some of whom have since blossomed into gifted dancers and were the first pupils to be trained in that institution.

Kunju Kurup of Thakazi and Narayana Nair of Kavalapara were the two great masters who taught them and Madhavan, Krishnan, Kelu, Shivaraman, Haridas were all promising young boys. Gopinath was the senior most among them, but he had already had Kathakali training in Travancore under his brother and was a visiting student to learn the Cochin style of Kathakali.

Gopinath was a shy lad when I first met him, but intelligent and hard working. He was also striking looking with a bright face, lit by two dark eyes, a strong graceful body and a pair of nimble feet. It is a pity he has changed for the worse in this last respect though he retains the vigour and the vitality of his art.

The Cochinites do not take kindly to the Travancoreans. There is an age-long feud between these two



GOPINATH

parts of Kerala. The Cochin folk are cleverer than their neighbours, and therefore more cunning ; but the Travancoreans are a more generous and brave people. Cochin women are famous for their beauty and the Travancore men are jealous of this in their heart of hearts!

And this petty jealousy and provincial feeling colour subtly all that they say and do and extend themselves to the art of Kathakali. The Travancoreans think that their presentation of this art is the best and the most classical; the Cochin dancers do not even bother to listen to such foolish claims!

There is no doubt whatsoever that Kathakali as practised and presented in Cochin is purer in form, richer in abhinaya and more elaborate in technique. These differences do exist ; and it is observed by competent critics that the tala sense of the Travancore dancers is better than that of the Cochin players. It may be true, for even among the modern dancers, Gopinath, who is a Travancorean, shows better tala sense than Madhavan, who is a Cochinite.

Gopinath's place in the Kalamandalam was, therefore, delicate and difficult. Though a senior student and the most advanced pupil in Kathakali, he was not the show-boy of the class. Madhavan, Krishnan and Haridas were the pets.

Gopinath, apart from his studies, had to do other kinds of work and very often served visitors, which in a sense proved a blessing in disguise. It brought him in touch with a wider world, and his modesty, humility and willingness to be useful, won for him sympathy and the friendship of outsiders.

Thus he came to know Ragini Devi, when she was studying Kathakali at the Kalamandalam ; and I too fancied his simple unassuming nature, and above all his dancing talents, and when Ragini planned a big recital

later in Bombay we decided to take Gopinath and present him to a larger public. And that is how it happened that he was, for a time, Ragini's dancing partner and the first to popularise Kathakali all over India.

Kathakali, at that time, was not even appreciated in its own homeland, and the idea of presenting it in short dance forms was a novel one. It had not been done before ; and even Vallathol was very dubious about such experiments. They later proved such a success, thanks to Ragini and Gopinath, that they have now become regular features of Indian dance programmes. To record a fact, the idea of lifting a dance scene from a Kathakali story and presenting it as a solo item was the present writer's and I was only happy that it proved a big success.

And here let me record another fact, which may interest some and amuse others. One of the first popular articles on Kathakali in English was from the pen of the present writer and it appeared in almost all the leading journals and newspapers in India as the subject then was new and novel.

I tried to give Kathakali its due credit and dared to classify it as a classical art and compare it with the Bharata Natyam. This enraged the Tamil pandits who waxed eloquent over my ignorance and were indignant at my audacity. The joke of it is that they are now among the ardent admirers of this art. Kathakali today is a national heritage!

Gopinath has other contributions to his credit. His "Shiva Parvati" dance in "Sringara Lahari" caught the popular fancy so much that it was even filmed for a screen picture. His "Hunter Dance" is a great favourite among the public. In his dance school, whether at Trivandrum or now in Madras, he is ever experimenting with new ideas, some of which are good and some positively bad.

His "Nartakalayam" at Trivandrum was quite a popular institution and students even from outside came to study there. A Palace Dancer, he was in demand for all court functions and he has danced before some of India's leading men and women. His annual recitals at the Madras Music Academy and the Fine Arts Society, during the Christmas week, attract the biggest crowds, and as a dancer he is a big box-office success.

His new venture as a film star may prove a success or may not. He has lost something of the charm of his younger days, and though he still retains the humility and the confiding simplicity of his early life, he gives one the impression of a thriving prosperous Bhagavathar. In fact, he is often mistaken for the singer Thyagaraja Bhagavathar! His great dream of a magnificent building for his school, with a large theatre, studio and class-rooms, though temporarily realised at Trivandrum, is now only a question of time.

Gopinath is a stern disciplinarian and a hard task-master, and as a teacher a terror. He does not spare the rod and is often violent. Even his wife, as a pupil, does not escape his wrath. Albeit, he is a sound teacher. He has some promising pupils who, in their turn, are bound to bring credit to him and to his school, Chandralekha, his favourite Ceylon pupil and a friend of the writer, had ambitious plans for Gopinath in Ceylon but death snatched her away suddenly before she could realise them. Her last successful appearance at the Regal, in Colombo, was a silent tribute to her teacher and his training.

A traditional art like Kathakali is bound to suffer at the hands of amateurs; and when the so-called society girls go gate crashing, "to have a little fun", as they say it spells disaster. There are already signs of it being cheapened and vulgarised for film purposes, and rash and reckless experiments, even by dancers like Madhavan,

cause it untold damage.

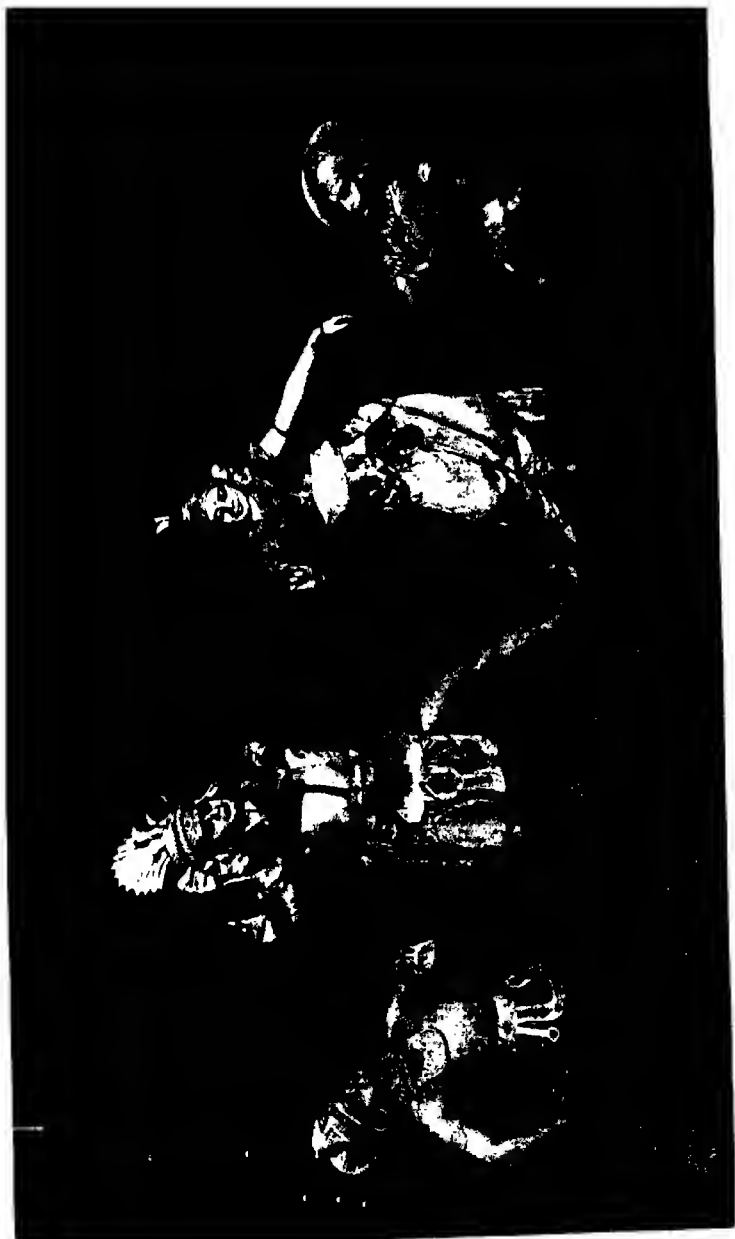
Gopinath too must go slow and realise his responsibility, and with the knowledge and enthusiasm he has and the opportunity he possesses he must show to the world the best in Kathakali, of which he was such a serious and sincere student in his earlier days.

Thankamani was a chubby little village girl when I first saw her. Short, fair, plump, dull and lazy, she was quite uninteresting. But there was a spark in her eyes, even then, that attracted one's attention to her. She had come from Kunnumkulam to be trained for Mohini Attam by the late Kalyani Amma and was the first girl student of the Kalamandalam. She often sang for Kalyani Amma's dances.

When Gopinath met her she was an indifferent dancer but a promising pupil. Their marriage had all the flair of the village romance: clandestine meetings, secret rendezvous, go-between, miscarried messages, hopes and fears. A Travancorean is certainly not a desirable groom for a Cochin maid, and a bride-hunter from the south is certainly not to be tolerated! That was Cochin view. But their romance ended happily in marriage, and Thankamani brought him luck.

Both have endeared themselves to the public, especially to the Madras public, and their joint appearance is a regular and popular feature of the Christmas art festivities in Madras. Thankamani has shaped well under the strong training of her husband and has proved herself an ideal partner.

Seeing her dance, Zohra, Shankar's partner, remarked: "I never knew that a village girl could dance so well." She meant it as a compliment to Thankamani, but she forgot that it is the village girls of India who even today possess grace and beauty, rhythm and gait, that are a lost heritage to our city-educated girls, and it is they, again,



Uday Shankar and Simkha in "Shiva-Parvati" Dance.



Shankar's Ballet "Lanka-Dahan".



Shankar in "Nirasha".



Shucka and Santar as "Shiva-Parvati".



Gopabath and Thandamuni in "Srinagar-Lahari".



Sadhoua Bose in Kathak.



Aloucha in Kathak.



Abhinaya by Ram Gopal



Uday Shankar

Renu Gopal

Gopinath



Seemati Shanta



Vaokamani



Thumble Sua in Manipuri

who still preserve some of the finest traditions of our dance art.

The Malayalees, as a race, are frugal, calculating and niggardly, live a simple healthy life and do not hanker after unnecessary luxuries, even the moneyed among them. They are the cleanest community in India, and their womenfolk among one of the prettiest.

Thankamani has all the natural charm of a Malayalee girl and the unsophisticated sweetness of a village maiden. In her native dress she is a perfect picture of untutored beauty, but travel and visits to cities have vitiated her taste and she likes to shine in silks. She has her little ambitions: gold chains, more gold chains; bangles, more bangles !

7

UDAY SHANKAR

PUBLICITY is a passion with politicians. No less is it with artists. It is the very breath of their existence, their life-blood. There are, however, artists who instinctively shrink from undue publicity, who fight shy of the crowd and abhor 'ballyhoo' in any form. Uday Shankar is one such artist.

Fame came to Shankar early in life and unsought. Honours piled thick upon him unsolicited. Beauty beckoned him while he was yet young and fortune smiled on him all the way through.

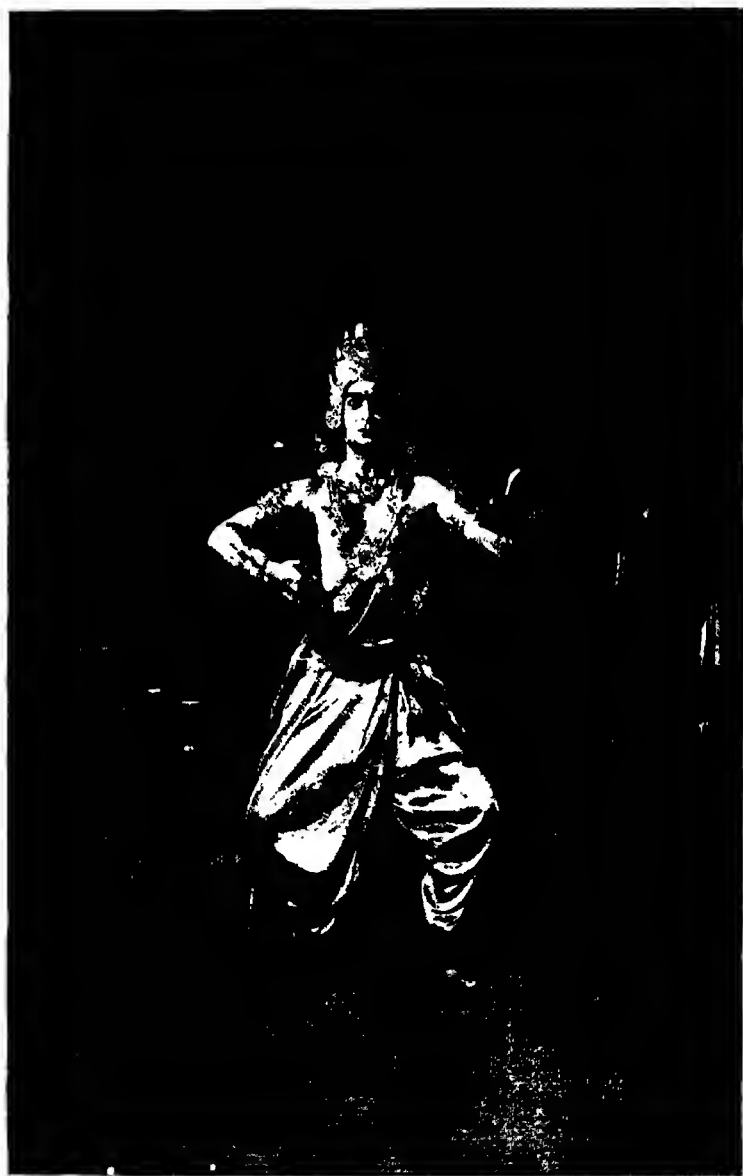
Like Tagore, he was discovered first in Europe. Rothenstein spotted his genius; Pavlova fanned it to a bursting flame; Simkie shared his first triumphs.

A student of painting, he first sought beauty through line and colour ; now as a dancer he expresses it through rhythm and movement.* Shankar has a streak of asceticism in his nature. In fact, most artists have a sense of non-attachment, though, paradoxically enough, they are extremely selfish and utilitarian by nature.

He has certainly the dancer's ambition for self-expression and the perfection of his art. But, like all true offerings of a devotee, they are dedications for a higher purpose.

He is strangely other-worldly too. You notice it in his talk. He is interested in what people say and listens to them politely, but his mind is away among the clouds. It is not absent-mindedness.

He likes comfort and lives decently, but his heart is



UDAY SHIVKAR

restless and pants after the more abiding things of life. I noticed this when we, (Zohra, Kamladevi and the present writer) lived together for a few days in Malabar and in Madras. He had everything that money could buy and yet he seemed unhappy.

He made quite a fortune out of his art, but is not rich today. His bank balance is a myth. What he earned he spent and shared liberally with his comrades. Like Tagore, he liked the best that life could give and money was no consideration. For an artist he seemed a bit of a waster, to my mind.

"To tell you the truth", he confessed once, "I've no money of my own. I earned, since I started on my career, over forty lakhs and spent more. I do not know what I would have done without the help of my friends."

Shankar's humility is well known. His modesty is no pose. He is too sensitive to be rude or vulgar. His face is as an open book, and his soft gentle eyes reflect the largeness of his heart and the goodness of his soul.

He has the artist's vanity, to be tidy of person, to be elegant, to dress simply but effectively, to preserve his face and form, to be smart-looking, but he is certainly no dandy.

In spite of his extensive travels and international outlook, he prefers the simple things of Indian life and looks strikingly fashionable in his plain white kurtas, pyjamas and chadas. Fashion is what you make and not what you copy. He is as unostentatious in his dress as he is unassuming in his manners.

But he is by no means a plaster-saint. Being human, he has his weaknesses, moods, impulses, and even a strain of selfishness. Artists, like women, cannot help being selfish; it is but a biological instinct. The creative faculty has this self-protective element innate in it.

He is naturally proud, not so much for what he has

achieved as for re-discovering to the modern world some of the hidden beauties of one of India's oldest arts. He is a great cultural messenger in his own way as the poet Tagore was.

Great as is his art, greater is his humanity. Not that he is a conscious social worker or a practical philanthropist, but his attitude towards life, towards his fellowmen, is intensely human. He hates exploitation, affects no airs, nor does he put himself upon a pedestal.

His colleagues and fellow-artists have nothing but the warmest appreciation of his consideration and affection for them. "He treated us all equally and paid us well," remarked one of his men after a world tour. His Almora art centre was another proof of his practical nature.

He has of course (being the boss and leader), the ordinary human failings of being aloof and unapproachable to all and sundry of his party, to indulge in solemn sermons, to moralise, to warn and to admonish. That is only natural and quite human. Lesser men have proved worse tyrants.

Shankar is, undoubtedly, India's showman number one. He knows what to present and how to present it. His wide knowledge of the world's best theatres and foremost producers has, of course, equipped him with the necessary skill and initiative. But more than these it is his inborn aesthetic sensibility, love of order and refinement, his practical businesslike ability that are responsible for the artistic success of his shows.

This is no mean contribution from him to Indian cultural life, and for this, if not for anything else, India ought to feel grateful to him. Indian showmanship is, at its best, only tenth-rate. Shankar's shows are always a big success from both the box-office and stagecraft points of view.

There are, however, differences of opinion, in India at any rate, about his art. There are those who refuse to see anything great in his art and deny its classical character. There are others who go to the other extreme and hail him as the greatest dancer of modern India. Both do him no justice.

Shankar, today, is as well grounded in the classical technique as any other dancer and if he takes any liberty with it, it is with a view to serve some purpose he has in his mind, and that is to use the medium of dance art for interpreting new ideas, for tackling modern problems of life, for awakening people's mind and hearts to newer visions and hopes.

This, of course, is a novel and strange innovation and absolutely foreign to the art traditions of the country but it cannot be denied that such experiments are useful and have both educational and entertainment values provided they do not violently clash with the ideals and technique of the art.

Of course, such experiment bristle with difficulties and are beset with dangers and require daring imagination, deep knowledge and creative faculty. Mere meaningless mixing up of styles and forms will not make any art great, much less an art like Indian dancing.

The so-called Indian ballets and the neo-classical dances of the pseudo-artistes may yet prove the undoing of the fine work that is being done for the art by its genuine exponents. The dance is art and not a mere entertainment or the means of earning a living.

Style is a big factor in art. It is the individual expression of not only the technique but the mind and character of the artist. Where even art is a racial heritage, as it is in India, individuality does count, and impersonality in art does not mean poverty of style or self-expression.

Shankar is not a traditionalist, and he does not pretend to be an interpreter of any classical school of dancing. Not that traditions have no value for him ; on the contrary he believes in their importance in art and life, but he refuses to be a mere mechanical manipulator of old forms.

His art is not orthodox and, therefore, such questionings as " What type of dance is his ? " and " How much of his is Kathak or Kathakali ? ", have no significance. His dances may not be classical but they certainly have a rhythmic vitality, a sweet cadence and a rich beauty like some of the best of our folk-dances.

Shankar's two famous ballet compositions, mostly in the Kathakali technique, are definitely Western in pattern, though the story-telling of them is in terms of Indian dance rhythms. He believes that Indian dance art forms could purposefully be used not only for educating the masses but also for propaganda purpose.

This idea of using art for social or political propaganda is modern and however praiseworthy the motive may be and however original and skilful the conception and creation may be, it certainly is not the best and highest purpose or function of art.

Art for the sake of propaganda is a Marxian idea, especially when it is asserted that this can and must be its only function. True art carries with it its own special message of beauty and its own cultural propaganda, and to regiment it to some definite social or political end is certainly to stepping it down. Art, like life, is, and that is its justification.

Shankar's Art Centre at Almora is a past history now. It was an ambitious and a laudable effort, and with his international reputation and financial backing from England and America, and especially the patronage of Dartington Hall, it had the possibility of becoming a great cultural and dance centre.

But many things contributed to its quick and sudden end. First of all, the place he selected for it was remote, with a climate not suitable for Indians and their mode of living. Secondly, in spite of a supervisor to look after its management and interests it was, somehow, mismanaged from the very start which led to its closing ; thirdly, the war prevented Shankar from making any world tours for collection of funds and stopped all help from outside ; fourthly, the strict discipline with which it was started soon gave way and an epidemic of romances and marriages raged within the centre, as was natural in such an institution, especially after the example set by Shankar himself ; and lastly, the response from the Indian public, both in the way of pupils joining the school and patronage from the princes and the well-to-do, on which he so much counted, was too disappointing. The closing of the Almora Art Centre was a big blow to him and to his reputation.

And now, to make good this failure and to raise funds for its revival, if possible, he has ventured on a film production for both Indian and international markets. "Kalpana", he has titled the film, and it is supposed to be a story of his own dreams, ambitions and hopes in dance technique. He has been at it for quite a long time and rumour has it that he has spent a fortune on it. He has conceived it in a big way, with ultra-modern sets, costumes and effects, and hopes to make a big hit with it. The best wishes of all his friends go out to him in this fine enterprise of his.

RAM GOPAL

BANGALORE was known to the outside world long before Sir Mirza made it the show-place of Mysore and the tourists' paradise in India. The Bangalore Girl did the trick. Her beauty preceded her morals and she was talked about not only in the barracks of Burma and Britain, but also in the studios of Denham and Hollywood. She has even crept into fiction and is slowly becoming a legend.

But the first Bangalore Boy to take Hollywood by storm, to dazzle the critics in the West and to win an international reputation as a dancer, was young Ram Gopal. He did it all in an amazingly quick time and without much effort.

His sudden rise to fame and popularity was a surprise even to himself, and to his friends a complete bewilderment. Not that he was a dud who suddenly burst out into a genius but that fate should have been so magnificent in her generous gesture to an ambitious unknown Indian boy.

Even the elephant boy Sabu's rise to stardom was less spectacular; and Uday Shankar's genius was like a steady glowing flame. All these three were "discovered" by foreigners first, while Indians were suspicious about their rising tide of fame and half-hearted in their support.

Robert O'Flaherty picked up Sabu at the Mysore elephant stables and Alexander Korda made of him a film star; Anna Pavlova spotted Shankar in Paris and Alice



RAM GOPAL

Bonner shaped him into a dancer of world-wide repute; Ram Gopal was La Meri's find and Alexander Janta's protege.

Shankar and Ram Gopal have a lot in common and both won name and made money at a very early age. Both are born dancers, sensitive artists, fine of form and feature with graceful bodies and supple limbs and a passion for dancing. Both are eclectic in their life and exotic in their art.

Ram Gopal, one of half-a-dozen children, was the Cinderella of the family, but the most gifted. His father, a native of Ajmere, an agnostic by faith and a scholar by habit, settled down in Bangalore after a successful career at the bar in Burma. His hobby was to edit Shakespeare and to issue rationalistic tracts.

Ram's mother had been a beauty in her days and was an impressive old lady. A Burmese with the old blood of the Shan tribes, she dominated the household and was the one big influence on the children. Ram has inherited something of the artistic genius and wild impulses of his mother's race.

The story of Ram Gopal's dance career is like a chapter from fiction. The father had, of course, other plans and hopes, and would have been happy had his son followed his footsteps or taken to some profession; dancing, in his opinion, was certainly not a desirable profession.

And so the boy, impelled by his inner nature and a craving "to shake his legs", had to resort to secrecy and silence to learn the art. Bangalore was then not the place for dance schools or teachers, though a few are cropping up now, and he had to be satisfied with recorded music and his own intuition and rhythmic sense to interpret his art.

Possessed of an attractive body, natural charm and a stage personality, he ventured to give short private

recitals of his own, with the aid of a mere gramophone ; and, wonder of wonders, he did make a good show of them and impressed people with his instinct for dancing.

The late Yuvaraja of Mysore was one of the first to recognise his talent and to encourage him, and it was about this time that I came to know him personally. Seeing his enthusiasm and single-handed efforts to master a great and complicated art, without help or sympathy, I suggested to him to take to it seriously and to get a good grounding in the classical technique.

It was the least I could do for one of his enthusiasms, and he lost no time in joining the Kalamandalam to study Kathakali, and soon picked up enough to give a show of his own to select audiences.

As luck would have it, La Meri, the famous American dancer was visiting Bangalore, and impressed by his personality, straightaway accepted him as her partner on a world tour. And thus came to him his first big opportunity to vindicate his genius, to give fuller expression to his talent, and to win recognition as one of India's gifted dancers.

He travelled with La Meri in the Far East ; then from Japan, with the help of a Polish friend as impresario, danced his way into the hearts of the people in America and Europe. Returning to India, he organised a troupe of his own and visited Europe again, and in London alone he appeared at the Aldwych Theatre for six weeks and made a small fortune for himself. Critics in all these countries showered superlative encomiums on his personality and art.

In India, however, where he danced before the Madras Music Academy and in some other important cities, his reception has not been so spontaneous or enthusiastic. It was to be expected. Art appreciation in this country is often mental and critics here care more for

technique and tradition than for style or individual uniqueness.

A great classical art like Indian dancing does not, of course, accept any amateurishness, and its highly stylised forms and cherished conventions are not easily to be ignored. In fact, an ancient art like the Bharata Natyam admits little room for any improvement or elaboration by modern dancers.

It is a perfectly conceived art meant only for the expert and the connoisseur. There is really no such thing as an "amateur" in Indian art ; and I do hope dancers like Uday Shankar and Rom Gopal realise this fact.

As dancers, they know, I feel sure, its depth and greatness, its difficult and intricate technique, its beauty and richness ; and it is perhaps their passion for it that has made them set aside certain age-long practices of the art and introduce modern innovations in the methods of its presentation.

Whatever may be their intrinsic worth as classical dancers, which is really not much, there is no gainsaying the fact that both these artists have not only popularised Indian dancing in Western lands and won recognition and appreciation for it. Ram Gopal's art has considerably improved after his return from Europe this time as he has been grounding himself hard in the orthodox technique with the aid of good teachers. But still there is something in his art which does not truly reflect the spirit and beauty of Indian classical dance.

Like Ravi Varma's paintings his dances are pretty but not convincing. Their superficiality is obvious. His solo dances do not last more than a few fleeting moments while real classical dances of the Bharata Natyam type often last for even an hour or more without a break or pause.

Vital, eager, intelligent, forceful and ambitious, the

effect of his personality is immediate and arresting. Add to this, fine artistic gifts and varied experience, and you have a man of whom much may be expected.

Having seen Ram Gopal at work and having closely watched the unfolding of his talent, with due appreciation of the difficulties he had to contend with and overcome, not the least of which is his lack of even a rudimentary knowledge of Indian music, I can unhesitatingly say that he has really achieved something new and interesting in his expression. More than his art, it is his burning passion for it that has always interested me.

With his personality, natural talents, enthusiasm and wonderful opportunities, (for luck has been a great factor in his life and art,) he could have risen to greater heights had he taken the trouble to study the art seriously and sincerely and worked hard at it under great masters. As it is, unfortunately, he played lightly both with his life and art, and preferred to be a showman rather than an artist. For when all is said and done, there is nothing really great or enduring in his art, and like the tinsel with which he often surrounds his shows, his dances are light and gay, attractive and exotic. Such an exponent has no message or inspiration for the world. That is his tragedy.



SADHONA BOSE

INDIAN films are pathetic proofs if proofs were ever wanted, of our genius to vulgarise things. Even the most sacred and beautiful in Indian life and art do not escape their vandalism. Our most cherished ideals, our immortal literature, our great heroes and supermen, and even the very gods and goddesses have not escaped the withering effects of their accursed touch.

Our films are positive proof, if proof were wanted, of our incompetence to produce anything great, noble, original and beautiful in the creative realm. If anything, they are a pitiful exhibition of our mental imbecility and cultural bankruptcy. The stupendous creative imagination which once characterised the ancient people of this country and which still makes the rest of the understanding world stand in awe and wonder, is most conspicuous by its absence in our modern life and thought.

We talk big but produce little. We have become a second-rate nation with a third-rate mentality. Our pre-present-day poets philosophers, artists and authors, with few rare exceptions, loudly proclaim our poverty. Our output is much, but nothing solid, substantial or lasting. There is an awakening, it is true, but it is still in its sleepy stage. All our achievements belong to the past; we have only national frenzy, caste arrogance, communal quarrels, petty jealousies and poverty of mind and heart to show to the world.

These are harsh judgments, I am aware; and not a

pleasant task, I assure my readers. But it is the most devastating truth, none dare deny. And a little introspection and self-examination, now and then, may not do us much harm; on the contrary, much good.

It is a bit unlucky that the story of Sadhona Bose's dances should have this depressing background and begin with this pessimistic note rather strongly expressed. But it has nothing to do with her either as a dancer or as a film actress but with the actual existing state of affairs in the Indian film industry, which is the third or fourth biggest industrial enterprise in India. And it is no mean industry either. Its influence on the people is immense and, therefore, its responsibility all the more great. It is not its technical achievement, poor and primitive as it is, that I wish to find fault with but the mercenary mind behind it which wants to exploit not only human beings but ideas and our heritage as well.

Now, the dance art in this country is a rich heritage, as rich as our music, painting, architecture, and literature, and with a tradition and technique as varied and vital as our civilization itself. It has a long past, a rich history, a grand tradition, a perfected technique and a sacred association. And now see what the gentlemen and the ladies of the shadow-world have done to it. They have prostituted it as no other art or aspect of Indian life has been prostituted before. It may sound a cruel indictment, an exaggerated denunciation. I honestly wish it was ; but but the facts are otherwise.

Of course, the dance is a beautiful thing and must be exploited to the full in any entertainment or enterprise like the film. But it must be done with understanding and taste, and not indiscriminately, violating the traditions of the art and the beauty of the dance itself. Whatever may be the story, mythical or historical, social or religious, classical or modern, the dance must be introduced some-

how. That is the film producer's first law of being.

The more the dances, the more is the money the film is sure to fetch. Why, then, bother about the rest ? India is rich in dances, all sorts, classical dances, folk-dances, death-dances, devil-dances ; catch hold of any girl or girls, no matter young or old, good or bad looking, straight or deformed, black or white ; get them trained to shake their hips, to jerk their necks, to blink their eyes and to jump to the drum-beat ; don't mind if the dance is in any particular style or in no style or in all styles ; make a mumbo-jumbo of dancing, we know our audience. Money is the thing. Put more sex into it. Get, if possible, the vulgarest girl available and the least fussy in such matters, and there's your mighty, stupendous masterpiece of the age ! That, crudely, is their policy.

Even educated producers and directors perpetrate this atrocity. We saw an example of it recently in a much-boasted film. It was an unholy jumble of half-digested styles and techniques of Indian dances ; the only redeeming feature was that it was not vulgar. Most films exhibit the morbidity, the lewdness and the debased mind of the over-sexed female of the species and not the gracious beauty inherent in Indian dances. The pity of it all is that Indians and Europeans alike take these film monstrosities as the real classical dances of India.

✓ Sadhona Bose, both as a dancer and a producer of films, has been a notable exception. She has, perhaps, not made any stunning success of her dance-films, but she has certainly not vulgarised them, so far as her items are concerned. She has not exploited her sex either for the dance or for the film. It is true that her own knowledge of the classical dances of India is limited and, like Shankar, she wishes to interpret her ideas or moods through a mixed technique of Kathak, Manipuri and Kathakali, in all three of which she has some mastery.

All her dance-films have not come up to the standard expected of her, and her 'Raj Nartaki' was definitely disappointing, considering the opportunities she had. It may not be solely her fault as she has to depend upon so many factors in the making of a film. Often the director is responsible for failure and the cameraman can easily give a helping hand in spoiling a picture. No Indian director, so far as I know, has yet succeeded in putting across a first-class dance entertainment as Hollywood does. Here and there, a director manages to take a few interesting shots but, on the whole, Indian dances are badly taken, synchronised and edited.

I often wonder when and where and by whom a full-length picture of real classical Indian dancing is going to be made. Uday Shankar's 'Kalpana', now in the making may prove to be a sensational picture with effective modern sets, improved technical skill and even artistic finish, but is it going to be a real classical dance-film, showing the subtle elements of the art? I doubt it. Sadhona Bose's Ajanta is advertised to be definitely a classic. We have been promised such tempting fare before and have been let down so often that we cannot help being sceptical.

Sadhona Bose has toured the country with a troupe of dancers, and people have seen her art on the stage as well as on the screen. My own impression is that she comes off better on the stage and in group dancing than on the screen and in her solo items. Her technique, in all the three styles, is poor; and though possessed of a stage personality, she is slightly on the heavy side for a dancer. Indian dances, either folk or classical, are full of graceful movements, sculpturesque patterns, studied poses and subtle nuances in the manipulation of the neck, eye and lip movements, and for these the dancer must possess not only a supple body and an expressive face but an alert

mind and a keen time and music sense. Most of our much advertised "premier" dancers are sadly lacking in the former and are woefully ignorant of the latter.

Young, attractive, cultured, Sadhona Bose comes of a well-known family, whose members have richly contributed to the art renaissance in this country. She married Madhu Bose, an artist himself, and together they thought of giving a lead to the film industry. She acted and danced and he directed and filmed. Fate was unkind to them and their pictures were not artistic or financial successes. For a change, she collected some girls and boys from Malabar who knew a little Kathakali and toured India with success. Later she joined forces with another director and tried two dance pictures, and with the same result ; if anything, worse. Undaunted, she thought of becoming a producer herself and announced her Ajanta film. She has risked her money, reputation and career in this all-out venture, and it is to be seen what she is going to make of it.

Sadhona Bose has a winsome personality. A generous hostess, she likes to entertain, and in spite of her cosmopolitan taste, has a partiality for sandesh, rasagola and nimkie, the Bengali delicacies. The few times I met her in Bangalore and Bombay (and was even entertained by her) I was impressed by her free, friendly attitude, intelligent talk, wide outlook and general interests. She admired some dancers and was critical of others, and I noticed that her judgment was fair and unprejudiced. She did not cry down the other dancers nor did she hold any extraordinary opinion about her own art as is the fashion among most artists.

She was modest enough to accept her ignorance of the highly evolved technique of the classical dancing and wished that she had the time and opportunity to get herself a good grounding in Bharata Natyam. To her, she

said, Indian dancing gave an inner satisfaction, and she felt happy to express herself through it. Even if she has not achieved all that she would have liked to along this line, it is good to know that she is conscious of the great future that awaits this art not only in India but in the world, and that she would like to contribute her bit towards its better appreciation. A noble dream, worthy of a member of the Tagore family.

PART TWO



Courtesy : Artist

" RAVAN " IN KATHAKALI

B. K. K. Hebbar

BHARATA NATYAM

BHARATA NATYAM is in fashion today. It is on everybody's lips, and certainly on most modern girls' feet; and tragically enough, on some young men's too. Such a feverish tendency in any fashion is a danger signal, a definite indication to disaster. Over-enthusiasm in anything spells ruin; and it is ruining Bharata Natyam all right.

Bharata Natyam was, for ages, an hereditary trade, a specialised craft, confined to certain communities. It has its background, conventions and caste rules. The custodians of the art were, and are, traditional teachers, the nattuvans, and the exponents of the art, the devadasis.

The nattuvans were a hereditary caste of professional musicians who taught the art to the temple dancing girls on an "insurance" basis. The nattuvans taught their pupils free and the dancing girls, in return, shared a certain fixed proportion of their earnings with their teachers all their lives. So mutually interdependent were they that the devadasis dared not exhibit their art without the nattuvans, who on their part, were always at their service. This is observed even today.

Being a cultural aspect of life, it was rooted in the religious practices of the people and formed part of the temple life. Later it had royal patronage and became a courtly art. And today democracy plays havoc with it.

Because of its sensuous and erotic character, the wise men who codified it had it taught to women of certain

birth and breeding, certain aptitudes and attainments. But it cannot be denied that an art like Bharata Natyam has within it unsuspected heights of emotional experience and spiritual upliftment, and equally unsuspected depths of sexual thrills and degradation. It all depends on the dancer and her upbringing.

True it is that, in the course of the many centuries it has survived, it fell from its original religious pedestal and became a plaything of passion and a questionable profession. The devadasis, instead of being vestal virgins, became the mistresses of men and public entertainers. Such was its fall that it was even tabooed from the marriage festivities where it had its last shelter. That is where Bharata Natyam stood, a decade or so ago, when the present democratic deluge came upon it.

Wonder and enthusiasm are the two secret keys to the understanding of any art, especially ancient art ; and Bharata Natyam more than any other, demands these qualities in a beholder for a proper evaluation and enjoyment of it. A knowledge of its history, technique and aesthetics certainly adds to one's intelligent appreciation of it. Bharata Natyam is a unique cultural heritage, and its re-birth was, therefore, hailed with glee and joy by art lovers in this country.

But tragedy followed close and quick on its heels. It soon became a thing for exploitation and vulgarisation. Its past was forgotten, when even queens became dancers and dancing girls saints ; its age-old tradition and technique were flouted, caricatured, mutilated and murdered by the mistaken enthusiasm and vanity of little men and women.

The name Bharata Natyam itself was misinterpreted to suit one's individual idiosyncrasy and satisfy one's petty provincial feeling. The simple definition is, of course, the dance art of Bharata, after its compiler. Because it is

primarily the art of bhava, raga and tala, the pandits made an anagram of it from the first syllables of these three words, BHA-RA-TA.

The nattuvans and the devadasis of South India do not, however, call it by that name. It is a word recently coined. To the traditional teachers and the dancers it is known as keli or silambu. The old Tamil word for it is koothu or attam, all meaning play.

In the 1800 years old Tamil classic, *Silappadikaram*, it is referred to as koothu; Chakyarkoothu is the actual word used, meaning the dance of the Chakyars, an hereditary caste of dancers. In Kerala, where ancient South Indian culture and language are still to be seen in a purer form, there are even today these professional story actors, the Chakyars; and the dance hall in Malabar temples is known as koothambalam.

Though the much older Tamil work, *Silappadikaram*, deals with the romance of a dancing girl and is a mine of information on the dance and music arts of ancient South India, it is the *Natyasastra* of Bharata that is the authoritative text-book. Even *Natyasastra* is not all-comprehensive and does not cover all the aspects of the dance arts of India, though it lays down their fundamental principles.

The *Abhinayadarpana*, *Sangeetaratnakara* and *Tandavalakshana* are later commentaries, and the Tamil *Bharata Choodamani* and *Natanathi Vadya Ranjanam* closely follow the *Natyasastra* in their basic ideas with minor differences here and there.

The *Bharata Choodamani*, for instance, deals with such various aspects of music and dancing as *Natyalaya-bheda Nirupanam*, *Melakarthathi Suralakshna Nirupanam*, *Sathuranga Sadosanga Talalakshna Nirupanam* and so forth. This book is supposed to be the work of Agastya himself, who dedicated it to the Madura king, Rajasekara

Pandyan.

The Natanathi Vadya Ranjanam is a kind of Arya-Dravida Bharata Sastra, and refers to the art as practised in the districts of Madura and Tirunelveli in South India, and mentions the names of once popular nattuvans such as Subaraya Annavi of Trichendur, Kalyanaswamy Pillay, Peritambi Annavi, Ponnuswamy Annavi and others. This book follows the Natyasastra in its main thesis with, of course, local traditions and names.

The devadasis are classified into three: Rajadasi, Devadasi and Swadasi. Rajadasis are those who dance before the dhvajasthambams (flag-staffs in temples); devadasis dance in Siva temples and the swadasis on special occasions like kumbhabhishekams. The arangtral is before the god Ganesha, and not before Parvati as in some schools. A dedicatory dance before the Nataraja is deprecated.

Bharata Natya, according to this book, is one of the twelve tandavas with special emphasis on the sringara rasa, and to be danced by women only. Male dancers of this are likened to widows as harbingers of evil and bad luck.

The twelve tandavas are: Ananda-tandavam (Samaya Jothi Natyam), Sandhya-tandavam (Geeta Natyam), Sringara tandavam (Bharata Natyam), Tripura-tandavam (Perani Natyam), Oordhva-tandavam (Chitra Natyam), Muni-tandavam (Laya Natyam), Samhara-tandavam (Simhala Natyam), Uggira-tandavam (Raja Natyam), Bhoota-tandavam (Pattasa Natyam), Pralaya-tandavam (Pavai Natyam), Bhujanga-tandavam (Pitha Natyam) and Suddha-tandavam (Padasri Natyam).

The nine rasas: sringara, veera, karuna, adbhuta, hasya, bhaya, raudra, shanta and bibhatsa; the five asanas: padma, simha, yoga, veera and siddha; the four knee-bends: mandala, ardhmandala, samamandala, and nritta-



Balasaraswati in Bharata Natyam



Rakmini Devi in Bharata Natyam



Harvest Dance



Shanta in Mohini Attam



Shanta in Bharata Natyam

KATHAKALI CHARACTERS



Krishna



Dushasana



KATHAKALI SKETCHES BY RAJESH INKAR RAU II.



Mohini



Purati





Aquatint 'Kalkakali Dancers' 1895-1896



Dance sculpture, Mount Abu from a dancing by Jagannath Abhinavi

mandala; the three foot-positions: anjita, kunjita and urdhanjita; the three bhangas: sama, lalita, valita; the three angabedhams and the various karanas, angaharas and mudras—all this theoretical information can be glanced from these works.

But for the actual technique and practice of the art one must go to the living teachers who have tried to preserve the old traditions all through the centuries. The absurd attitude of some, who have half-learnt the art themselves, that these nattuvans are no more necessary, that their hereditary character is imaginary and that any layman or woman can master it and even improve upon it, is really to be pitied.

The nattuvans are a bad lot in all conscience; so are all professional men, including professional musicians. No nattuvan ever teaches his pupil all his art; no pupil can really exhaust a great master. Born choreographers they are, they play tricks with their compositions and their manodharma in their art is as great and creative as any born musician's.

Most of the nattuvans one comes across in cities like Madras are, of course, common men, with no creative genius, and anyone can be independent of them. But there are masters who cannot so easily be disposed of and who can only laugh at all these futile attempts to oust them from their hereditary trade. Another reprehensible thing is the open competition of these educated amateurs with the professional devadasis in consenting to dance at wedding houses where the pandemonium is worse than the market place.

Blood will tell, they say. There is something in that idea. Caste is the visible expression of that invisible "something". An hereditary goldsmith or weaver has a sixth sense of his trade to which no outsider, however cleverly trained, can lay claim. A born dasi's thaluku,

kuluku and minuku are her own and cannot be repeated by the cleverest imitator. Each to his trade is a wise old saying.

The old stone-carvings and sculptural poses might give some idea of the form and style, but you can no more reconstruct a dance-sequence from these figures than you can delineate the character of the Java Man from his fossil. A series of plastic poses copied from old friezes and frescoes, with no connecting rhythmic links and music background, will not be dancing. An Indian dancer with no knowledge of music is a patent fraud.

Bharata Natyam, as we see it practised today, is not a literal interpretation of the *Natyasastra*. An age-old art like it is certain to undergo many changes in its history according to local demands and conditions ; and the eccentricities of its exponents are bound to colour its texture and complexion. We can see it even today being mutilated beyond recognition by the degenerate *nattuvans* and the still more dangerous dancers of international repute.

It is claimed that the present-day Bharata Natyam came to South India from the Andhra country and it flourished in Tanjore under royal patronage. The claim is made on the grounds that much of the literature available on the subject for the *nattuvans* is in Telugu, that most of the songs for *varnams*, *padanis* and *sabdams* are in that language, and that some of the famous *devadasis* in the Tanjore court were Telugu women.

All these may be true. But it is like claiming that because Tyagaraja's *kritis* are the sweetest in Carnatic music and are sung oftener, therefore, Carnatic music had its origin in the Telugu country. Surely the conception of the *Nataraja* image was not inspired by Andhra genius and the innumerable dance carvings on the walls of old temples were not the work of the Andhra craftsmen?

But what is certain and historic is that this art, as we see it to-day, owes its present arrangement and order to the four nattuvans of the Tanjore court, Chinniah, Ponniah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu, all brothers, the last of whom was a contemporary of the Travancore ruler Swathi Thirunal. Vadivelu was a gifted musician and composer, the first to introduce the violin in Carnatic music, and in his grandson's house at Tanjore can still be seen an ivory violin presented to him by Swathi Thirunal.

It is to this family that we owe what we know as Bharata Natyam in the South, one of its direct descendants being Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillay, 'the greatest living nattuvanar today. It is at Pandanallur and in his family that the art is preserved and practised in its classical form, and it is the pupils of this teacher who represent it at its best.

This nautch dance of South India, as evolved at Tanjore, usually consists of two parts, the nritya, in which is included nritha or pure dance, and abhinaya or the art of gesture. It follows closely the Carnatic music in its structure with its pallavi, anupallavi and charanam; its five jethis, tisra, misra, kanda, sankeerana and sathwiasira; its seven talas: adi, ada, dhurva, maddia, rupaka, tripuda and jampa; its ragas and ragamalikas. In the pure dance the tala is more pronounced and prominent than the raga.

The dance begins with the alarippu, which is in the nature of an invocation. It is supposed to be a corrupt form of the Telugu word alarimpu, meaning decorating with flowers. The danseuse stands in an erect attitude with feet close together and hands folded above the head. From this she proceeds to execute numerous neck movements, eye and hand acting harmoniously, rechakas as they are called. In one place, semi-seated, she repeats the rechakas and soon after she moves to the background

with quick steps to the rhythm, dhigi, dhigi. This is pure dance.

In the next piece, jethiswaram, the music and movements are a little complicated. Jethis are time-measures; there are five of them, consisting of units, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9 beats. The dance is set to one or more of these. The teacher behind the dancer keeps time; the drummer adds to the rhythm by playing a complicated combination of pleasing sounds, and the dancer weaves out yet another sound cadence with her feet that confirms to the tala.

The combination of sound effects is one aspect of the beauty of this dance. The other beautiful aspect is the pleasing play of the eye, the arch movements of the neck, the graceful spreading out of the hands and the fanciful rhythmic patterns of the feet from the simple to the complicated.

The next is sabdam, an interpretative dance to a song of erotic or religious sentiment. The song is usually in Telugu, descriptive and poetic, and it therefore lends itself to abhinaya, and there is much scope for samchari-bhava. This dance is often omitted in ordinary recitals, but it is of great help to a conscientious artist who wishes to render the long exacting varnam that follows it without any stop or break, as it gives her sufficient rest for the feet and time for the mood.

Varnam is the most interesting and difficult item in a Bharata Natya programme. It is a happy combination of both nritya and abhinaya, and often lasts for more than an hour. The background music is set to words usually embodying a love sentiment; and the finale of the dance is a crescendo of quick movements and fast changing foot-patterns to the accompaniment of corresponding quick drum jethis, known as thirmanams.

The charanam part of this dance is full of rich movements and if well done, especially in rare ragas like kalyani

or navaratnamalika, as Srimati Shanta does, it is one of the most beautiful dance compositions, as delightful to the heart as it is fascinating to the eyes.

After such a strenuous dance as the above, the danseuse needs a restful change, and it is here the abhinaya part comes handy. This is also a very popular item for the connoisseurs. Abhinaya is an elaborate gesture language and a system of dramatisation of the emotions through eyes, face, limbs and hands. It is purely interpretative, and the songs interpreted may be either erotic or devotional. In this the dancer can reveal all her skill and genius.

The songs are known as padams, with a dominant love sentiment, and some of them are really exquisite musical compositions. The songs of Jayadev, Purandara-das, Kshetrajna, Muthutandavar and Bharathi lend themselves to it and are popular with the public.

Tillana is pure dance with intricate foot rhythm, and the movements and attitudes are sculpturesque. In this dance are to be seen all the subtle nuances and graces of Bharata Natyam and its strength and beauty. It is best seen when the danseuse has an ideal body, like that of Kalidasa's Malavika, and dances with an intelligent understanding of the sculptural effects of the dance. Youth is the first requisite for a dancer, not middle age.

A programme of Bharata Natyam lasts from two and a half to three hours with the necessary musical interludes. Some finish the nritya part in the first hour itself and take the rest for abhinaya. But to do justice to the art it should be two hours for nritya and an hour for abhinaya, as Bharata Natyam is more a dance art than a dramatic art, though Bharata classified it as dramaturgy.

Abhinaya is certainly a very attractive element in Bharata Natyam but it is being overdone by some of the modern exponents. As it is, there is sufficient abhinaya

in the nritya parts like varnam and sabdam and to take another large slice of time for abhinaya in the padams is not doing full justice to the dance part of it.

Of course, when an artist, owing to age or heaviness of body, is not able to render the nritya part completely it may be excusable, provided she is greatly gifted in abhinaya like Balasaraswati. Again it is the Pandanallur School, it seems to me, that lays the right emphasis on this. In the programme of its pupils one sees a perfect balance of nritya and abhinaya, and also a richness and variety of expression that one misses in others.

The reasons for this are not far to seek. It is only at Pandanallur that the traditions of the old Tanjore School are religiously preserved and practised; and the Grand Old Man of the art, Vidwan Meenakshisundaram Pillay, still lives there teaching and guiding his pupils with the utmost reverence for the old style as recreated by his ancestor Vadivelu.

His art is rich in adavus, and as he teaches, he goes on improvising them in his dance-sequences, which often puzzles the learners. Strength, vigour and freedom of movement characterise his art which, when compared with the spineless and insipid movements taught by the other nattuvans seems a veritable Himalaya by the side of the Vindhya. It is in the detail that his art is perfect and his ensemble of dance-patterns is a thing of joy to the beholder. Hence the sheer beauty of his choreography.

There are in the south other nattuvans, some his pupils and some descendants of other nattuvans of other days who, though following the same traditions, have softened the movements, distorted the patterns and weakened the technique, thinking, perhaps, that thereby they are making it look more graceful; or can it be to save their pupils' breath and their own?

It is obvious to those who have the eyes to see and

the heart to feel that it is not an improvement but a definite distortion they have effected in the art, albeit unconsciously. The Madras nattuvans, though originally from Tanjore, are the worst sinners in this respect. They seem to be in blissful ignorance of the sculptural and other beauties of the art, except the jethis.

The silly notion that the softening of the movements and the unnecessary shakings of the neck and hip and limbs add grace to the dancing has taken hold of their heads, and this has resulted in its present degeneracy, in the dull, crude, lifeless, inartistic and pathetic performances of what was once, and must be, a virile and beautiful art. Some of the danseuses trained by these men do not even move from their place, and refuse to bend their bodies (often they cannot), or make the least exertion to stretch out their arms or bend their knees to produce the necessary dance-designs.

Their thirmanams are such poor caricatures that they may be mistaken for some silly waving of their palms at somebody, their wild jerks of the neck remind one of the turtle in its shell; their clumsy jumps are like frogs in the rains; so graceless is their art. It is at least excusable if the danseuse is over thirty and, therefore, stiff and frigid, but that young girls should be so trained is sad indeed.

Bharata Natyam is a virile art, like the Russian Ballet, and its beauty is in its strength; for beauty is strength. In the gentle glidings of the neck, in the poised position of the dancer as she stands to render the rechakas (not the erect "stand-to-attention" military attitude), in the outstretched hands at shoulder level, firm and even; in the correct bends of the body, in the sculptured design of the poses, in the free and forceful broad movements and in the perfect finish of the thirmanams by the full flourish of the arms and the complete curve of the body—all of

which characterise the Pandanallur style—one really sees the vital beauty and the inner strength of Bharata Natyami.

This art should be learned at a young age, at the age of seven, according to tradition, but even if the arangatrāl be at an early age, the actual appearance before the public should be only after the child has grown into a girl. She must possess a developed body to do bare justice to her art, leave aside form and personality.

Dancing involves tremendous strain and needs sheer physical strength for a proper use of the arms and limbs. Out of the sweat of her brow and body a dancer learns the secrets of her art, and often out of her bleeding heart and mind. The mere bodily immaturity of the child precludes her from becoming a presentable dancer, and yet there are parents and teachers who indulge in this thoughtless cruelty.

And the sight of a child dancer on the stage is too comical for words! In the first place, she gets lost on the stage; often so small is she. In the second place, the heavy costumes and jewelleries smother the poor creature with their weight. And when she dances with her tiny face and sticklike legs and arms, feeble and faltering, she is as amusing as the antics of a trained circus monkey. It is really too fantastic for an art; and dancing is an art, not an amusement!

It is sad, indeed, that an art so sublime in its beauty and so rich in its heritage—there is no other dance art in the world to be compared to it—should, at the very outset of its rebirth, be exploited in this manner. It is good that there is such genuine enthusiasm for it; it is good that more and more educated young girls take to it; it is good that the old odium attached to it has gone for ever; but it would be infinitely better if both the public and the youthful aspirants took to it a little more seriously and viewed it a little more critically.

Bharata Natyam is an art of tradition, a tradition handed down from master to pupil, and this tradition must not be lightly treated, much less vulgarised. The beauty of this art is such that it will make a universal appeal if it is well and artistically presented. It is only when the art is lifeless and the artist a soulless robot, performing mechanically her part, that the public go to sleep or get bored.

Most of the innovations that one sees in modern Bharata Natya recitals, in the costumes, music and even in the art itself, are positively crude and inartistic. The old jewelleries and dress have certainly a definite dignity and beauty of their own, and admirably suit this ancient art. A modern orchestra, with saxophone and all, as background music, is a monstrosity which would not be tolerated anywhere else in the world. And yet it too is coming into fashion!

Dancing transcends racial or language barriers; and if the art is truly classical and if the dancer dances not only with her feet but also "with her head", and if she conforms to the traditions, no audience will ever get bored. I know of at least one Bharata Natya artiste who keeps the most critical as well as the most cosmopolitan audience absolutely interested in her art for full three hours. Time, in her case flies; hours pass like minutes. That is the true test of the art, of the artist as well.

Dance appreciation in India is often mental, and critical only from its music aspect. Dance, of course, rests on music, especially on the laya aspect of it; and the critics are satisfied if the dancer's tala sense is perfect and her footwork is clean and clear-cut. They pay little attention to the aesthetic or technical perfection of the dance.

She may dance as clumsily as a little elephant, heavy and panting; she may be as stiff and crooked as paralytic patient in her poses and attitudes; she may be as dull and

monotonous as the professional politician's speech; these do not disturb their conscience. If the music is good and the dancing is to the tala they are satisfied.

Such is the colossal ignorance of some self-styled critics that one of them, to whom Uday Shankar's art is the highest embodiment of Indian Classical Dancing, dismissed Bharata Natyam in a few words as crude and barbarous. The dashed conceit of it all! One does not know whether to characterise it as imbecility, idiocy and lunacy.

Even Shankar himself will admit, and has admitted, that he is not a classical dancer, that he uses the old technique for some purpose of his own, and that before the great Kathakali and Bharata Natya artistes he is only a novice and an amateur. This is no humility on his part but the bare truth.

The present wild craze for modernising this ancient art and the unholy perpetrations made on it, and in its name, by modern young dancers must be stopped if Bharata Natyam is to be saved for the future. By all means let us modernise many of our social, religious and political institutions, but there are certain aspects of our cultural life which don't need it.

Culture, like the fragrance of a flower, is one of the deeper things of life, which when modernised become cheap and vulgar. Some things of the old world are beautiful and perfect and are best when left untouched. Bharata Natyam is one such, for like the Upanishads, it is the heritage of the race.

KATHAKALI

KERALA is a fascinating bit of coastal country in green paddy fields running in serpentine curves, the extreme south-west corner of India. Its wooded hills with vegetation of variegated kinds; its flanked by thickly planted plantain and arecanut groves and garden-houses; its backwaters, with little islands and lovely lagoons, reflecting dreamily the blue sky and the fantastically bent palms on the banks; the grey huts and the red-tiled roofs, peeping through the rich foliage of garden compounds; the big bare-breasted women working bent all day long in the fields, singing sad songs to forget their lowly lot; the dark strong-limbed men at their ploughs and oxen; the white-clad and martial-looking Nayars and their womenfolk of soft olive complexion, dark eyes and shy look; the proud exclusive Nambudri with his caste arrogance and social tyranny; the oppressed untouchable and the unseeable with their long-drawn agony and misery; the magic and mystery that still surround life there; all these exert a strange fascination on a visitor.

Kerala is a tropical paradise, with palm-fringed horizons and surf-swept beaches, only to be rivalled by Lanka or Java. Kerala is rich in art too. The old temples and palaces contain fragments of faded frescoes as interesting as any in India; wood carvings and stone sculptures as beautiful as those of Gujerat; folk-dances as sweet and simple as the Garba. But the unique and by far the

most famous art of Kerala is Kathakali, the dance-drama par excellence of India.

Kathakali is one of the most highly perfected pantomime arts in the world. In its present form, it may be said to date back to the early eighteenth century, and its association with a prince of Travancore may, to a certain extent, be historically correct. But its roots can be traced to a race and civilisation much anterior to the Aryan, and its antiquity must indeed be very remote considering it has certain primitive elements in its rhythm, music, make-up, dress and ornaments, and considering also that it gave birth, at a distant date, to the Javanese and Kandyan dances. It has certainly absorbed and assimilated parts of Bharata Natyam, which gives it its cultured character.

I have no doubt in my mind, whatsoever, that its original impulse was in magic, and even today its elemental nature can be felt by any sensitive person. It must have played a tremendous part in the religious rites of the ancient people, who knew how to invoke invisible powers, both of evil and good, by symbols of sounds and gestures. Both primitive and civilised nations of the world have recognised and used this symbolic language for communication with subtler worlds and invisible beings. The Egyptian Masonry, the Hindu Vedic rites, the Chaldean magic, all these were forms of magic based on a deeper understanding of the laws of nature.

It was well known to the ancients that sounds and gestures create definite forms and colours in subtler matter, and they have a certain meaning and message to spirits whose aid is sought by these psychic formulas. Some of the sounds accompanying the drum-beats in Kathakali, as in the opening scene of Keechakavadha and the like, are distinctly of the spirit-invoking kind. I do not know how far the actors themselves realise the magical quality of their art—I suppose they feel but do not

understand—but I am certain that the powers they invoke and release are tremendous:

Kathakali, as its name indicates, is a story-play, or the narration of a story in the form of a dance drama. But in this case the drama is pantomime or dumb-show, accompanied by music, song and dance. It is a unique dramatic art, as daring in its conception as it is complex in its expression. Even a whole epic like the Ramayana or the Mahabharata is presented to the public without a single word spoken by the actors but through an evolved technique of suitable gestures, suggestive poses, clever facial masks and appropriate songs and music. It is more elaborate than a musical play and more exacting than ordinary drama.

It is an open-air show, meant to be performed in a grove or courtyard and never inside a theatre. It has not, therefore, the usual painted curtains and horrid backgrounds of the Indian stage to mar its general effect. Its settings are simple and admirably serve the purpose: just a shamiana with a high roof supported by four poles, a tall bell-metal oil lamp burning all through the night, shedding a cool light and not trying to the eyes of either the actors or the audience, a beautifully coloured cloth held in front by two boys for a drop-curtain, and a stool for the actors to sit upon or rest their legs.

The orchestra consists of two singers (narrators of stories), a maddalam player, a chendai player, a cymbal and a song player. A conch is sounded at the beginning of a show. The first impression of this music is rather harsh but when the ears get used to it it is pleasing and enjoyable. The audience sit in front on a matted floor, and the singers and drummers sing and play standing immediately behind the actors.

The play, usually a story or scene from the classics, lasts a whole night, from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m., at times conti-

nuing for several nights. In its own place and among its own people this is all right and even necessary, as it is the only religious recreation in that part of the world that is free and open to all. The Kerala Kalamandalam, under the direction of the poet Vallathol, has now introduced certain innovations by which several scenes from one play or different plays can be presented to a cosmopolitan audience in two or three hours time. Ragini Devi and Gopinath were the first to try this experiment outside Malabar.

The conventional form of presenting a play is as follows: First, there is the announcement to the villages all around, known as Kelikottu, drum beating about sunset time; and this is followed by Thodayam and Vandana-sloka (dance music and prayer) behind the curtain, a little before the commencement of the play; after this comes the first appearance of the characters amidst a loud flourish of drums and conches, known as Purappadu; and the interval between this and the actual opening of the story is taken up by Melappada, musical contests between the maddalam and chendai players and the singers.

The stories interpreted are in poetic form and set to music, which closely resembles the temple music of South India. Several gifted poets, some of them princes, have contributed much to this art. The singers here, like the Dalangs in Java, are not gifted with a good voice, which is unfortunate, and even the drummers should be trained to play softer music than they now do. It would not be a bad idea if Edakai were introduced where solo dancers interpret sringara or soka rasas. For a proper appreciation of this art by the world at large certain changes need to be introduced and experiments to that end should be attempted.

There are thirty varieties of dances, some simple and some complex, in Kathakali, and they are based on a

sound knowledge of the rhythmic laws of body movement. The main emphasis seems to be not so much on grace as on strength, and hence the variety of beautiful movements and steps in the dance. A student of Indian sculpture can easily trace in this art the various bends and flexions, poses and postures that he sees in stone and bronze images.

Kathakali is not merely suggestive and interpretative but highly descriptive and realistic too: witness, for instance, the Peacock Dance. It is an amazingly truthful portrayal of the bird's moods and movements, its vanity and majesty. The composer of this dance was not only a keen observer of nature and particularly of the life of the peacock, but also a psychologist who understood the bird's flutterings of heart and mind. This clever imitation and interpretation of animal and bird life is an interesting feature of Kathakali. Knowledge and originality characterise every one of these interpretative dances, and not just mere personal whims of the dancers as in some modern dances.

It is here that tradition helps and keeps in check individual idiosyncrasies from running riot. A sad feature of modern art is this supreme conceit and folly in art interpretation and creation without the requisite talent or training. Tradition can both help and hinder: it all depends upon the artist and his genius.

Abhinaya, i.e., interpretation and portrayal of moods and emotions through hand-gestures and facial expressions, is a singularly significant aspect of Indian dancing, and it is developed into an elaborate science and art. Body movements and rhythmic footsteps have their own important place in Hindu dancing and are based on a profound understanding of the beauty of the human body. Bharata Muni, the reputed author of the *Natyasastra*, has elaborated a system of gesture-language, and it is in use, though in a corrupt form, in the several styles of Indian dancing.

But the unknown authors of Kathakali, either following a more ancient tradition or creating a new one, have enriched this with a wealth of idioms, phrases and expressions nearly as complete as the spoken language and capable of interpreting even abstract ideas. Some of these mudras are as descriptive as any poetry and some as suggestive as any symbol. They are based on a deep knowledge of life and nature, and when you consider that the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are interpreted successfully by this gesture-language, its achievement becomes almost incredible. Not only the gods of the Hindu Pantheon with their consorts but even nouns, verbs and exclamations have their apt mudras. Their description is, at times, true to life.

Being a descriptive language it is naturally much more elaborate and intricate than the spoken language and takes time to master. The memorising of the twenty-four root-mudras and their endless permutations and combinations would itself take a long time, but to be perfect in their exposition and to master simultaneously with it the nine movements of the head, the eight glances of the eye, the six movements of the eyebrows, the four postures of the neck and the other 64 movements of the feet, heels, toes, ankles, waist, wrists, palms, cheeks and eyelids, as practised in Kathakali, is indeed a matter of strict and careful training for several years.

That is why a pupil takes six years to get some proficiency in the art, and no one is allowed to teach another unless he has learnt it for more than that period. The discipline and regular practice these pupils have to undergo are very rigorous and exacting, almost a yoga.

What stupendous vanity it is then that some young dancers, after an indifferent learning of Bharata Natyam or Kathakali for two months and even less, should assume all sorts of fantastic titles like *Natyakalaratna*, *Natyas-*

charya, Natyasimha, start schools of dancing with themselves as masters, and even try to improve poor old Bharata's age-old technique! In the whole of Kerala there are only a handful of these great masters, among them Thakazshi Kunju Kurup, Ravunni Menon, Kavalapara Narayana Nayar and a few more.

Make-up and mask play a great part in Kathakali. This is a specialised art requiring years of practice. The mask consists of a white outline (chutty) made of rice paste and cleverly done in relief on the sides of the face from ear to ear, and the face within it is painted green, on which one can observe the display of expressions very clearly. As a mask it is a work of art and more interesting than the paper or wooden masks used in dances all over the world. The colour schemes follow definite rules and suggest types. Noble characters have a mild green (paccha) within the white chutty; rakshasas or wicked characters have several layers of chutty, red round the nose, dark round the eyes, a white ball the size of a marble on the nose and a red beard. Women have a plain-make-up of white on a ground of yellow-red, minnuku as it is called. Kari or black is another primitive character with a black beard. These masks, even the fiercest of them, have a charm to which no other artificial masks can lay claim. Some of the wooden masks of Ceylon and Java are gruesome and grotesque beyond words.

The Kathakali costumes and jewellerys are certainly heavy and cumbersome and have a barbaric splendour of their own. It is difficult to know when and by whom this tight-fitting jacket with several scarfs round the neck and a full white skirt, suggesting the 18th century European dress in a crude form, was introduced in Malabar? It is so unsuitable to the climate and so unhelpful for a proper appreciation of the beautiful movements and poses of the dancers. It is certainly picturesque, especially with the

pagoda-like crown (mukuta) on the head, but not artistic. The lines and powerful movements of the actors and their shapely bodies are best seen when the dancers are at practice with just a loin cloth round their waists.

In representing bhayankara and bibhastha rasas on the stage the Kathakali actors cannot be excelled by any in the world, and their characterisation of the asuras is very realistic and awe-inspiring. The make-up, costume, gestures, music and tense atmosphere are all terribly demonic. It is only one aspect of this art, though an important aspect; but the Kathakali actors are equally clever in presenting sringara and soka rasas or vira and karuna. Usually a story in Kathakali begins with the sringara rasa, develops through soka or vira, and the finale, towards the early hours of the dawn, is always of bhayankara or bibhastha, with the gathering of all the Rakshasas at the close of the play.

Purapaadu, thodayam and ashtakalasam are not only the most difficult and complicated dances in Kathakali but also the most beautiful with their sculptural effects. They are pure dances, with a very involved technique, and the kalasams of these dancers are, like the thirumanams in Bharata Natyam a crescendo of quick movements and fast changing feet-patterns to the accompaniment of loud drum-beats. These are typical tandavanritta, vigorous and powerful. The lasya types in Kathakali are sari, kummi, panthadi and the like.

Being essentially a pantomime show and a dance-drama, the nritya part is more developed than the nritta, though the latter is no less important or significant. Kathakali is purely a masculine dance, where even women characters are represented by men, as Bharata Natyam is purely a feminine dance. Both these represent the tandava and lasya types at their best; but it does not mean that Bharata Natyam has no tandava element in it or Kathakali

no lasya. It is all a question of emphasis. Kathakali is certainly one of the most developed dance-arts, as it is the most perfect pantomime play in the world.

WHEN Mata Hari, the war spy and half-caste dancer, was questioned about her antecedents, she is reported to have said that Malabar was her birthplace, where she was trained in one of the subterranean shrines as a temple dancer.

This was of course, a pure fabrication, but it will be interesting to speculate why she concocted this story; whether she was in the know of things or whether it was just a shrewd guess?

Of course she was not the only pretender in this respect; she has her disciples in some Indian dancers whose brazen bare-faced lies about their ancestry and their dance training are as fantastic and foul as Mata Hari's, if not worse. The subterranean cave, the brahmin father, the devadāsī mother, the mysterious moulding of their palms and limbs over the shapely breasts of the stone images of the goddesses, are all there!

Whatever may be the truth behind Mata Hari's story, her intuition or artistic instinct did not play her false, for she must have somehow felt—or did anybody tell her?—that Malabar was not only a land of magic and medicine but also of the dance arts.

This narrow strip of land between the ghats and the sea is very intriguing, especially to the students of art and anthropology. Here you find quaint customs, strange usages and singular social laws, differing from those of the rest of India

Women here legally at any rate, enjoy greater freedom than women of the other provinces. The racial type is slightly different from the neighbouring Tamils or the Kannadigas. Its magic and modes of living have some resemblance to those of the island races.

Here you meet the remnants of the oldest Jews, the most ancient Christians, the earliest Arab settlers, and also some of the oldest dance and dramatic arts of India. Though these dance arts can be traced to one common source, they distinctly bear the stamp of its special genius.

Mohini Attam, or the Kerala Nritya as the poet Vallathol would like to call it, is a dance of that character. It is Bharata Natyam as evolved and practised in Kerala, and though it follows closely the science and art of Bharata, it has its own style and technique, its peculiar idioms and expressions, coloured considerably by Kathakali and other allied arts of Malabar.

This dance is usually performed by women even as Kathakali is by men. It is more a nritya type, though there is plenty of abhinaya in the interpretation of stories like the Geeta Govinda and the like.

The songs are mostly descriptive and are set to classical music. They generally describe the love pangs, the disappointments, the agony of separation or the joy of union of lovers, and all these are cleverly conveyed by suggestive facial expressions and significant gestures.

Every emotion has its appropriate rhythm and movement, and as the result of long training and practice they are displayed with an ease and mastery that is amazing. The art, highly formalised as it is, is nevertheless full of charm and freshness; and of course the personality of the artist counts much in such arts.

Mohini Attam was one of the forgotten arts of Kerala. It was practised by an appreciable number of women even as late as the beginning of this century, but

for over a quarter of a century and for causes unknown it became practically extinct and was seldom seen in its homeland.

There is no special caste, like the devadasis, to preserve the art or its traditions. Even the few who had learnt it from the old teachers were not eager to show it and fought shy of the public.

Thanks to the efforts of the Kalamandalam and poet Vallathol, a woman dancer was found in the person of Kalyani Amma, who first taught it to a few girls in Cochin and later went to Santiniketan, at the invitation of the late Tagore, to teach the pupils there. The discovery of the one-eyed Panikkar in a remote village of Cochin was a happy augury for this dance, as many pupils have since learnt it and, as usual, have started playing havoc with it.

Of all the dance and dramatic arts of Kerala, such as Kummi, Kaikottikali, Thullal, Chakyarkoothu and Kathakali, Mohini Attam has the best chance of being appreciated outside Malabar as, like the Manipuri Dance, it is simple in technique and can be learnt by all without much effort.

Its solkattu is like the alarippu in Bharata Natyam, a pure dance. The old Tamil name for alarippu was solkattu, and so it is known now among the devadasis. Its varnam, tillana and svrajethis, though not strictly conforming to the Bharata Natya technique, have much in common with them in general rhythmic appeal. Its kalasams are not as vigorous as in Kathakali nor so beautiful as the thirmanams in Bharata Natyam.

There is, however, this difference between the Tanjore Nautch Dance and the Malabar Mohini Attam: the dancer in the latter sings most of the time as she dances or along with the chorists, who sometimes lead and sometimes follow the dancer in singing. The musical ac-

companiments are almost the same except the edakai, a stringed drum, one of the oldest musical instruments of this country.

There are interesting similarities between this dance and the Kuravanchi-koothu as practised in Tanjore. Both are lasya types; both deal with love themes and are, therefore, of sensuous character, appealing more to the senses than to the soul. There are a lot of repetitions both in gestures and movements, but they are inevitable as the art is as conventionalised and tradition-bound as the dasi attam in South India.

The origin of this dance is also traced to a prince of Travancore who lived a hundred years ago, but that is only a popular belief. It is likely that this art was patronised by that prince even as Kuravanchi was patronised by the Tanjore king, Sarfoja. It was a fashion among certain princes of ancient India to appropriate for themselves the authorship of plays and music composition created by the artists of their courts.

Neither Kathakali nor Mohini Attam has fared better than Bharata Natyam at the hands of their modern exponents. They too have been cheapened and vulgarised, and their old traditions and technique, which were so jealously guarded and preserved by generations of asans, are now thrown to the winds and all kinds of liberties are taken with them not only by amateurs but by the younger generation of Kathakali dancers.

The lure of city life the glamour of the stage and screen, the glitter of modern fashions, and the hope of making money quickly have attracted these boys and girls from their poverty-stricken homes and villages from their age-long moorings, which, as could be expected, has not been to the advantage of either their lives or their arts. They found themselves in another world of make-believe and masks, and sold their body, soul and art to the first

bidder; and the bidders are, for the most part, not art lovers but money-making monsters.

My persistent reference to the modern craze of vulgarising ancient classical arts and my seemingly impatient attitude towards the amateur dabblers in the arts are likely to prejudice the reader against me. I may be mistaken for a reactionary, a die hard, a traditionalist and an antediluvian. That would be a mistake.

I am all for progress, change, modernisation, but along the right direction and along certain lines. I too hate tradition that has lost its soul or its significance; but I submit that all traditions have not lost their souls or their significances; that, in art, tradition is the most revolutionary thing I know, and that it is tradition that gives to art its vitality, its strength and beauty. An art without tradition is like a tree without its roots, a river without its bed. True art is both tradition and technique, not the whims and fancies of individuals.

INDIA'S seasonal festivals are many and varied. Living in the closest communion with nature and with an inborn love for the picturesque and the beautiful, the people of this land have closely watched and followed the varying moods of nature in the exuberance of her joyous creation. Nature to them was the mantle of Divinity, and therefore of sacred import and of spiritual significance.

Life and art in India were as spontaneous, free and unfettered as the nature around them; the life of the people was led in wide green shady groves and by the side of flowing rivers and flowery tanks. Nature was bounteous in her manifold gifts and the people were as generous as Mother Nature.

The natural religion which they followed gave them a sense of the reality of the unity of life, and folk art is the unconscious expression of that realization. The purpose of life for them was to fulfil the dharma in which they were born, ordained by a Wisdom greater than theirs, a Power stronger and a Law juster than theirs, and towards the fulfilment of that dharma they lived and worked in harmonious relationship with the environment in which they were placed.

Nature to them was not "red in tooth and claw", and they did not set out to conquer her by ruthless destruction with their human ingenuity. They, on the other hand, communed with her inner spirit and sought inspiration

amidst her external beauties. Their ambition was not to scale the steepest path and to climb the highest mountain in order to achieve an ephemeral triumph, but to reverentially allocate them as abodes for their gods and dedicate them as places of pilgrimage. Hence the Himalaya became the home of the great god Mahadev and the Ganges is worshipped as the Mother of the Nation.

Their great shrines and tirthas were built amidst the most magnificent natural scenery; deep isolated ravines far from the haunts of men; gorgeous, rich, verdant valleys watered by pure crystal springs; snow-clad peaks resplendent with the coruscating colours of the setting sun, these were the spots they usually selected for their religious and spiritual life.

This intimate association of nature with life and religion is well exemplified in the folk arts of India. The changing moods of nature into spring, summer, autumn and winter are closely linked with the life of the people. Marriages and festivals, worship and pilgrimages, sowing and harvesting closely follow these seasonal variations.

The spring time in nature is also the spring time in the life of the people. The Vasanta-utsava (spring festival) is of great antiquity and of universal merry-making. It is the festival of love when men and women, boys and girls, rejoice in frolicsome mirth and play with nature, which is recreating herself by putting on tender shoots of green leaves and blossom-buds of pearl-white, pale mauve and bright pink colours. This primitive spring festival later took the form of the Love Festival, Madana-utsava.

Another popular seasonal festival that is common all over India is the Holi or the Carnival of Colours. It is observed on the full moon day of the month of March to celebrate the coming of the spring with its life-giving southern breeze, the budding of the scarlet asoka flowers

and the fragrance of the mango blossom.

"The Holi", writes a well-known art critic, "is a true expression of the emotions of the Hindu East at spring time, when the warm sun which bronzes the cheek of beauty also subtly penetrates each living fibre of the yielding frame, awakening by its mellowing touch, soft desires and wayward passions, which brook no restraint, which dread no danger, and over which the metaphysical Hindu readily throws the mantle of his most comprehensive and accommodating creed."

When Vaishnavism and the Cult of Krishna absorbed this primitive festival and raised it to a religious ritual it became the Ras-Leela, invested it with a peculiar mystere and dignity. Of all the seasonal and religious festivals, this became the most popular and was enjoyed by all classes of people, without falling into any licentious or ribaldry like the Holi. A secular form of it was the Dolemancha, a kind of sport and pastime for young ladies, who sought the seclusion of the groves or gardens and besported themselves on swings with accompanying songs and music.

Of all the episodes of Sri Krishna's life on this earth, the Ras-Leela with the cowherd maidens of Vraja makes the deepest appeal to Vaishnavas, and especially to the people of Rajputana and Gujerat. The story is very old indeed, and it has been the favourite theme for ages past for singers, poets and painters. The great masters of the Kangra School of Painting depicted this story in a hundred and one entrancing ways in their wonderful miniatures; poets like Govindadas and saints like Surdas sang its glory in a thousand heart-helting songs; the Vaishnava philosophers evolved a system around it, and cults of different denominations came into being to carry on the tradition.

The story is gorgeous in its setting: "They met,

Krishna and the gopis of Vraja, in a lovely bower on the banks of the Jamuna. It was a moonlit night. The perfume of the full-blown Mallika attracted the bees in their thousands, and the whole grove was resonant with their humming. A gentle breeze was playing with the soft, murmuring ripples of the silver-flooded river.

"The sky-clad Krishna, the Lord and the Beloved of the fair maidens of Brindaban, played soft, entrancing melodies on his murli. The peacock feather of his crown, slightly inclined to the left, waved in the breeze. He wore a simple gold-coloured cloth round his waist and on his back, set off by a beautiful garland of flowers, which reached down to his feet. He stood under the Kadamba tree and played, and the music cast its spell all around. The young damsels stood near him and looked. He at once arranged them in a ring and began the dance to a tune of his flute.

"He danced and danced; so quickly did he move that everyone of the gopis seemed to think that he was by her side. He was here, there, everywhere, between every two of them there was a Krishna. They all danced, sang, for the Lord was in their midst. As they danced, the little bells in their anklets made a sweet jingling sound. Thus they danced under the Kadamba tree near the flowing Jamuna among the humming bees and fragrant flowers and under a moonlit sky."

Such is the origin and tradition of the Ras-Leela, which is still danced all over India and which still inspires dancers and singers. The sweet melodies of Meera still enchant its participants, and the joy of its rhythmic movement can still be seen in the Kathak and especially in the Manipuri School of Dancing. The folk-dance of Ras-Leela by itself is very simple and is performed by a group of youths and maidens, who move in a circle to measured steps, now slow and now fast, with small painted wands

in their hands, by which they mark time as they sing in a chorus accompanied by music.

The circle or the Rasa-mandala is two deep, and each player in the outer ring has his or her partner in the inner ring, and as they move round after striking several times with their respective sticks or hands in a given manner, the inner partner changes; thus every outer player meets and plays with an inner player. The music and songs are light and gay and aptly chosen, and the whole effect is pleasing to the eyes and thrilling to the heart. A simple folk art and yet a great national heritage.

It is against this vast, varied and rich background that a dance art like the Manipuri should be viewed. For in its essential elements, it is only a glorified Ras-Leela, only a little more sophisticated. Its main theme, like the Ras-Leela, is the Radha-Krishna story; its song and sentiment have all the lyrical flavour and bhakti rasa of the same.

How it came to be introduced into that far-off mountain region of Manipur in the far eastern corner of India, and when and by whom, is difficult to say now. It must have followed in the wake of the spreading of the Vaishnava cult from Bengal in the middle ages. It has certainly absorbed some of the elements of the folk dances of the natives of that valley, thus enriching its rhythm. It is said that every Manipur girl, like the Balinese belle, is a born dancer and a potential artiste.

Its special appeal is in the soft, gentle gliding movements of the dancers, who remind one of the graceful movements of waving corns in the field or the ripples of a quiet lake on a moon-lit night. Their supple bodies and arms bend and weave delightful patterns like the tender yielding branches of a bamboo grove. With such remarkable ease and grace these untutored village girls move, glide and dance, like the merging of musical notes in an

Indian raga.

The colourful picturesque costume of a scintillating skirt in red, blue and green, with bits of shining glass stitched into it and richly embroidered tassels dangling at the sides, a close-fitting waist to match and a conical cap hidden under a thin white veil add to the charm of the dance.

Being a Radha-Krishna dance, the part of the gopinis is played by young girls, and the only male dancer is the boy who plays the part of Krishna. Usually four or five girls, one of whom is Radha, dance in unison with Krishna, who attired in an equally picturesque costume of a pleated dhotie round the waist with embroidered tassels all around, bejewelled round the neck and chest, a peacock-feather on his crown and with a flute in his hand, gives the lead to the accompaniment of the drum. The drummer joins the dance, now and then, and when together they do some difficult talas, it is most fascinating to watch their quick rhythmic steps and movements. Manipuri is certainly one of the most appealing of the dance-forms in India and is easy to learn and master.

Its present-day wide popularity was mainly due to the genius of Rabindranath Tagore, who was the first to discover its subtle beauties and to introduce it to a wider world. He used the Manipuri technique in his musical dramas, like the "Nateer Puja", "Shap-Mochan" and "The Kingdom of the Cards", and had it taught to his pupils at Santiniketan. Naba Kumar was the first teacher to visit Santiniketan to train the girls; Gowri, the gifted daughter of Nandalal Bose, was the first great dancer to reveal its beauty to dance lovers all over India. From Ceylon to the Punjab it soon became a kind of a national dance, like the poet's national anthem "Jana-gana-mana"; and even schools adopted it as a part of their curriculum.

Its present fate is no better than either the Kathak

or Bharata Natyam. Naba Kumar, who later migrated to Western India, has made a good business proposition of it by teaching to wealthy folks; the amateurs, as usual, played havoc with it.

D'ANCING in India was never a mere social entertainment, nor was it always associated with religious worship. It was both. In fact, the artificial distinction of social life from religious life did not exist in India and does not even now exist among the orthodox Hindus. Religion colours every aspect of Hindu life and all expressions of life have their inspiration, if not their roots, in religion and religious practices.

Indian dancing shares this common characteristic with the social, economic, ceremonial and even political life in India. No religious observance is complete without song and music; and most forms of ceremonial worship are accompanied with dance.

Every child now knows the mythical origin of Hindu dancing: How Brahma had it first taught to Bharata Muni who in his turn, taught it to other rishis; and how Shiva initiated his disciple Tandu into his own vigorous tandava dance and taught his consort Parvati the tender lasya dance; and how Parvati taught it to Usha who, in her turn, taught it to the gopis and so forth.

Of course, this tracing of the origin of the dance to the gods—which every writer on Indian dancing seriously quotes as if it was sober fact is not the only reason for its religious character. That is merely symbolical and suggestive. But its real religious character lies in its close association with Hindu worship and festivities, of which it is an integral part. And since life in India is one unend-

ing series of religious observances, dance and music form the warp and woof of its texture.

Indian dancing is religious not because the gods of the Hindu pantheon indulged in it or inspired it, but because it is one of the ways of giving expression to one's highest spiritual nature, one of the ways of fulfilling one's dharma. All arts are only so many ways to mukti or liberation, so say the ancient books. Art, in its highest form, is yoga; and yoga means union, the union of the human with the divine, the spirit with matter, the subject with the object, the form with content, life with expression. The aim of all true art is and must be this. Other materialistic and pragmatic conceptions of art are puerile and unreal, according to Hindu thought.

The ancients regarded dancing along with the art of the drama as the fifth veda, and as especially meant for the humanity of the Kali Yuga. Even the other four vedas mention the art of dancing, and there are references to it being practised not only by the ordinary folk but by the rishis themselves. In fact the oldest art practised in this land seems to be natya in which is implied dancing as well. In Vishnudharmottam, a classic on the arts of India, Narada says that in order to become a successful sculptor or painter one must first learn dancing, thereby meaning that rhythm is the secret of all arts.

Even a casual survey of the history of Indian dancing confirms the universal importance and practice of dancing in ancient India. The puranas are full of interesting anecdotes and a host of dancers' names appear in the Vishnupurana, Markandeyapurana, Bhagavatapurana and others. The hero of the Mahabharata, Arjuna, was reputed to be a dance teacher who taught Uttara, the princess of Virata, when the Pandavas spent part of their exile in that Court.

Who has not heard of Chitrasena, the teacher par ex-

cellence of those golden days, who taught this art to Arjuna? Of the courtesan, Ambapalli of the days of the Lord Buddha, who renounced everything to become a bhikkuni; of her counterpart in South India, Manimekhalai, who did a similar thing; of the accomplishments of the exquisite dancer Madhavi of the Silapadikkaram; of Mahasveta, the heroine of Bana's Kadambari, who was as beautiful a dancer as Kalidasa's Malavika, and so on right down the ages to the Mughal days.

And it was during this period that this religious art became a courtly art under the patronage of Akbar and under the influence of Persian and Arabic culture imported into India by the Mughals. And like the North Indian music, the North Indian dance became more secular in character but retained the Hindu sentiment and feeling.

It was a happy blending; and the Kathak style of dancing that we see today is an offshoot of that fusion. Elements of the folk-art of ras-leela are in plenty in the Kathak; its themes are mostly of the Radha-Krishna legends; its technique is based on the natyasastra; but nevertheless its courtly character and the foreign influence in it are undeniable.

It will be obvious to any discerning student that the Kathak has not the richness of either the Bharata Natyam or Kathakali in its music, pattern and movements. Its abhinaya is confined to a few simple gestures and poses; its content, like its appeal, is lyrical and romantic. Its strong points are the graceful movements, fleeting footwork, swift bodily gyrations, speed and tempo. Though essentially a lasya type of dance it has plenty of vigorous movements and forceful steps. In its superficial aspects it resembles more the dances of the rural folk, though its technique and training are definitely classical and traditional.

However developed its nritya (mere dancing) part,

its nritya (expressional dancing) is very poor, especially when compared with the Bharata Natyam and Kathakali. Not that the Kathak has no abhinaya; it has, but not in so large a variety as in the South Indian dances. In the Kathakali abhinaya is so rich that a whole epic like the Ramayana or the Mahabharata could be intelligently narrated in gestures without a spoken word.

According to the natyasastra, all bhavas (aesthetic sentiments) are to be expressed by the bodily abhinayas, consisting of the 64 hand gestures, 8 eye movements, 19 head postures, 13 feet positions and so forth. Says the Abhinayadarpana of Nandikesvara: "Eyes must go where the hands are; mind where the eyes are; bhava will rise where the mind is; and rasa will follow the bhava." That is a complete dance; and this can be seen more in the South Indian types than in the Kathak or Manipuri.

Music is, of course, the basis for dancing. According to the natyasastra, dancing is only one of the three main elements that constitute sangeeta, the other two being the vocal (gita) and the instrumental (vadya). Laya is the primary basis for dancing, for any dancing, but in Indian dancing it is not only the tala but the raga and even the swara give it its name, form, content and character. A pure dance like the tillana can be danced to any of the ragas and in any tempo, quick (druta), medium (madhyama), and slow (vilambita). Here, again, the South Indian schools have a richer repertoire and a more developed technique than the Kathak.

This passing reference to the North and South Indian dances is not to belittle one or praise the other but to point out their respective merits and their due place in Indian dancing. In the Kathak dance itself there are several local variations and different methods of presentation. Delhi, Jaipur, and Lucknow are still the homes of the famous Kathak dancers. Many of them have, in re-

cent times, migrated to places like Bombay and Allahabad to make a living and have started schools of their own. Lachu, Achan Maharaj, Bindadin are some of the well known among them. Though traditionalists in their art, they have effected many changes in order to meet the present day demands of the amateurs and the films producers.

The best known of the cultured Kathak dancers is Menaka, who popularised this form of art throughout India and Europe. She founded a school and trained young dancers, some of whom, like Shevanti and Damayanti, have made a name for themselves. Film dancers like Sadhona Bose and Mumtaz have made it more widely known.

Manipuri came on the scene and for a time overshadowed the Kathak in cities like Bombay and Ahmedabad; Kathakali followed suit and ousted both for a while; and now Bharata Natyam is the craze among both professionals and amateurs throughout India. But the net result, as one witnesses them on the stage or screen, is a curious kind of hotch-potch, a mixed grill, a cheap cocktail of Indian dances, which is neither flesh nor fish nor good red herring.

The fleeting fragmentary glimpses of a Kathak thoda, Kathakali mudra, Bharata Natyam adavu, Tamil kummi, Kerala kaikottukali and South Sea Island hula hula shakes, all in an unholy jumble and in an undigested form, are neither entertaining nor edifying. Their seared souls and mutilated forms seem to cry out: "How long, O Lord, how long?"

MUDRAS IN INDIAN DANCING

THE gesture language is as old as man; but only in India it has been developed and perfected to play as important a role as the spoken language not only in the rituals and temple worship but in the arts of drama and dance. It is, in fact, an integral element of the Mantrasastra by the aid of which the humans could communicate with devas; hence mantras and mudras go together in temple worship.

Of course, the hand gestures used by the priests in their rituals differ from those used by the dancers, but their tradition and origin are as old as the Hindu faith. There is a regular science of the mudras as there is a science of the mantras; and the two great ancient treatises on Indian dancing, the natyasastra and the abhinayadarpana, contain valuable information on the symbolism of these mudras.

The natyasastra refers to 24 single hand gestures, 13 double hand gestures and 27 supplementary hand gestures thus making the total 64. The abhinayadarpana gives 28 single hand gestures and 4 supplementary, omitting the very unimportant ones and those that are not in constant use. The gesture language in Indian dancing is not confined only to these 64 root-mudras, but permit themselves to an endless permutations and combinations as can be seen in Kathakali. This ancient symbolic language in modern dancing has certainly undergone many changes and does not closely follow the natyasastra,

but in the main the spirit of the language, with slight variations, is preserved both in the Bharata Natyam and Kathakali.

I extract here, with due acknowledgment and thanks, from the valuable compilation made by Rajendra Shankar of the 32 mudras mentioned in the abhinayadarpana and used by the Kathakali dancers today.

Pataka (flag). See illustration. It is used to denote the commencement of a dance, cloud, forest, bosom, night, river, region of gods, horse, cutting, forbidding things, prowess, graciousness, moonlight, strong sunlight, knocking, wave, equality, taking an oath, silence, anointing one's own body, palmyra leaf, shield, benediction, 'such and such place', ideal king, sea, holding a sword, addressing a person, month, year, rainy day, cleansing.

Tripataka (three parts of a flag). See illustration. It denotes a crown, tree, 'Vajra' and its weider (thunder-bolt and Indra), a lamp, raising flames, pattern drawn on the face or the body, arrow, turning round, pigeon, union of woman and man.

Ardha-pataka (half flag) formed by bending down also the little finger in tripataka hand. It is used in denoting the tender shoots, board or slab for writing or painting, river-bank; saying "both", saw, knife, banner, tower, horn.

Kartari-mukha (arrow shaft face) formed by letting the forefinger and little finger of Ardh-pataka hand to spread out, denoting the separation of man and woman, overturning or opposition, plundering, corner of the eye, death, estrangement, lightning, sleeping alone, falling, crying.

Mayura (peacock). See illustration. It denotes the peacock's neck, creeper, bird, vomiting, arranging hair, auspicious or ornamental mark on forehead, sprinkling river-water, discussing Sastras and famous things.

Ardha-chandra (half-moon). See illustration. It denotes the phase of the moon on the eighth day of the dark fortnight, hand seizing throat, spear, consecrating image, dish, origin, waist, musing, one's own self, meditation, prayer, touching limbs, ordinary greetings.

Arala (bent) is obtained by curving the forefinger of pataka, and denotes drinking poison, nectar, etc., and violent wind.

Sukatunda (parrot's head) is obtained by bending the ring-finger in the arala hand and denotes shooting an arrow, spear, remembering one's abode, saying mystic things, violent mood.

Musti (fist) is formed by bending the fingers into the palm and setting the thumb on them. It means steadfastness, grasping hair, holding things, fighting mood of wrestlers.

Sikhara (peak). See illustration. It denotes god of love, a bow, pillar, tooth, questioning, phallic symbol, recollection, embracing, sounding a bell, saying 'no'.

Kapittha (elephant apple) is got by bending the forefinger over the top of the thumb in the sikhara hand, and denotes Lakshmi, Sarasvati, holding cymbals, milking cow, holding flower at time of dalliance, grasping end of robes, offering incense or light.

Katakamukha (opening in a bracelet) is formed by applying the forefinger and the middle finger on the thumb from the kapittha hand and slightly raising the other two fingers. It is used in showing the picking of flowers, holding pearl necklace, or garland of flowers, offering betel leaves, drawing middle of bow, applying perfume, speaking, glancing.

Suchi (needle) is obtained from the kataka-mukha with its forefinger raised, and means the Supreme Soul, one hundred, sun, city, world, threatening, pining, rod, body, astonishment, a braid of hair, drumming, potter's

wheel, consideration, decline of the body.

Chandra-kala (digit of the moon) is got by releasing the thumb of the suchi hand, and denotes the moon, the face, the crown of Shiva, the Ganges, a cudgel, the span of thumb and forefinger.

Padmakosa (lotus bud). See illustration. It means fruits of the 'bel' type and the elephant apple, breasts of a woman, ball, cooking pot, eating, bud, mango, scattering flowers, bell, ant-hill, lotus, egg, cluster of flowers.

Sarpasirsa (snake hood) is formed by bending the tips of the pataka hand fingers, and denotes sandal paste, snake, sprinkling, nourishing, the arms of wrestlers.

Mrgasira (deer-head) is formed when the thumb and little fingers of the sarpasira are extended, and means a woman, cheek, wheel, fear, quarrel, a deer's head, lute, female organ, roaming, etc.

Simhamukha (lion face). See illustration. It denotes a hare, homa, lion's face, rectification, preparation of medicine, etc.

Kangula is formed by curving the third finger of the padmakosa hand. It denotes a kind of fruit, bells worn by children, patridge, breasts of a young girl, water lily, bird and a kind of creeper.

Alapadma is formed when the fingers are turned askew round the little finger and denotes a full blown lotus, circular movement, breast, separation from beloved, mirror, beauty, full moon-lake, village, height, anger, cart, murmuring sound, praise.

Chatura. When the thumb is placed at the foot of the third finger and the little finger is outstretched while the others cling together, chatura is formed, and means musk, a little, gold, copper, iron, wet, sorrow, aesthetic pleasure, eye, caste difference, proof, etc.

Bhramara (bee). See illustration. It denotes a bee, parrot, wing, crane, cuckoo and similar birds.

Hamsasya (swan-beak). See illustration. It denotes blessing, raising the wick of lamp, touchstone, pearls, painting, jasmine, initiation, tying with string, etc.

Hamsa-paksa (swan-feather) is formed by stretching the little finger of the *sarpasirsa* hand, and means construction of bridge, number six, putting nail marks, covering or sheath.

Sandamsa (pincers) is got by bringing closer and drawing apart the fingers of the *padmakosa* hand in quick succession and means the belly, presentation, of offering to deities, wound, worm, number five, fear, etc.

Mukula (blossom) is got by bringing the five fingers close enough to meet, and denotes water lily, eating, God of Love with his five arrows, holding a seal, navel, plantain flower.

Tamrachuda (cock). See illustration. It denotes a cock, crane, crow, camel, calf, pen.

Trisula (trident) is got by bending the thumb and the little finger, of the *pataka* hand and means a bel-leaf, idea of trinity.

The four supplementary mudras are:

Vyaghra (tiger). The little finger and thumb are bent in the *mrgasirsa*, and denotes a tiger, frog, monkey, mother of pearl.

Ardhasuchi (half-needle) is formed by raising the forefinger of the *kapittha* hand, and denotes a sprout, baby bird, big worms.

Kataka (link) is got by joining the middle and ring-fingers and letting the others separate and denotes calling and moving, etc.

Palli (village) is derived from the *mayura* hand by putting the middle finger on the back of the fore-finger, and means a hut or village.

The *Sanyuta* hands are twenty-three in all as follows:—

Anjali (salutation). See illustration. It is held on the head, face or bosom to denote salutation respectively to God, Guru or Brahmin.

Kapota (dove) is formed by bringing together two pataka hands so that they meet only at the base, side and end, and denotes salutation, taking oath, addressing a preceptor.

Karkata (crab). See illustration. It denotes the coming of multitudes, showing the belly, twisting and stretching limbs, etc.

Svastika (crossed) is obtained by putting two pataka hands across each other at the wrists to denote a crocodile (makara).

Dola (swing) hand is formed by placing the pataka hands on the thigh and denotes the beginning of Natya.

Puspaputa (flower casket). See illustration. It denotes light offering (arati), taking water, fruits, evening, etc.

Utsanga (embrace) is formed by placing two mrgasira hands on the upper arm of opposite hands, and means an embrace, showing armlet and similar ornaments, coaching boys.

Sivalinga. See illustration. It indicates the phallic symbol.

Katakavardhana (link of increase) results from making svastika with two katakamukha hands at the wrists and denotes coronation, worshipping, marriage, blessing.

Kartari-svastika (crossed arrow-shafts) is formed by two kartari hands crossed at the wrists and denotes branches, hill tops and trees.

Sakata (car) is formed by stretching the middle finger and thumb of the bhramara hands, and stands to denote the gesture of Raksasa (demon).

Sankha (conch). See illustration. It denotes a

conch.

Chakra (discus) is formed by placing in contact the palms of the ardha-chandra hands at right angles, and means a discus.

Samputa (casket) is got by bending the fingers of the chakra hand and denotes a covering for things, casket.

Pasa (noose). See illustration. It denotes quarrel, string, noose chain.

Kilaka (bond). See illustration. It denotes affection, talk.

Matsya (fish). See illustration. It denotes fish.

Kurma (tortoise) is obtained by bending the end of the chakra hand except the thumbs and little fingers, and denotes a tortoise.

Varaha (Boar) is formed by two mrgasira hands, twisted at wrists and meeting with palms facing, and denotes a boar.

Garuda. See illustration. It is used to denote Garuda (bird).

Naga-bandha (sepent-tie) is the result of placing two sarpasirsa hands across at the wrists, and denotes pair of snakes etc.

Khatva (bed). See illustration. It denotes bed, litter.

GLOSSARY

Abhanga ..	Slightly bent.
Adbhuta ..	Wonder.
Abhinaya ..	Gesture language.
Angahara ..	Composition of various <i>karsana</i> .
Arangatral ..	Debut.
Asan ..	Teacher.
Asana ..	Sitting posture.
Asura ..	Demon.
Attam ..	Play.
Bibhatsa ..	Grotesque.
Bhava ..	Aesthetic emotion.
Bhayankara ..	Fear.
Chendai ..	A long drum.
Dalang ..	A Javanese story-teller.
Devadasi ..	Temple dancing girl.
Garba ..	A Folk-dance of Gujarat.
Hasya ..	Laughter.
Jethi ..	Time-measure.
Kalasam ..	<i>Finale</i> in Kathakali.
Karana ..	A fundamental pose.
Kari ..	Black.
Karuna ..	Compassion.
Kali ..	Dance or Play.
Kriti ..	Devotional song.
Koothamblam ..	The hall of dance.
Koothu ..	Dance.
Kumbhabhishekam ..	Ceremony connected with temple opening.
Lasya ..	The dance of Parvati (feminine).
Maddalam ..	A short drum.
Manodharma ..	Creative imagination.
Minukku ..	Shine.
Mudras ..	Hand gestures.
Nattuvan ..	Traditional dance teacher.
Nayika ..	Heroine.
Paccha ..	Green.
Pada ..	Song.
Padma ..	Lotus.
Raga ..	Melody mould.
Rasika ..	An aesthete.
Rasa ..	Spiritual sentiment.
Raudra ..	Terrible.
Sama ..	Level.
Samabhanga ..	Equally bent.
Samcharibhava ..	Elaboration of a song.
Shanti ..	Peace.
Silambu ..	Anklet bells.
Simha ..	Lion.
Sringara ..	Sexual love.
Tandava ..	The dance of Siva (masculine).
Tala ..	Rhythmic timing.
Thirmanam ..	<i>Finale</i> in Bharata Natyam.
Tribhanga ..	Thrice-bent.
Veera ..	Heroic.

